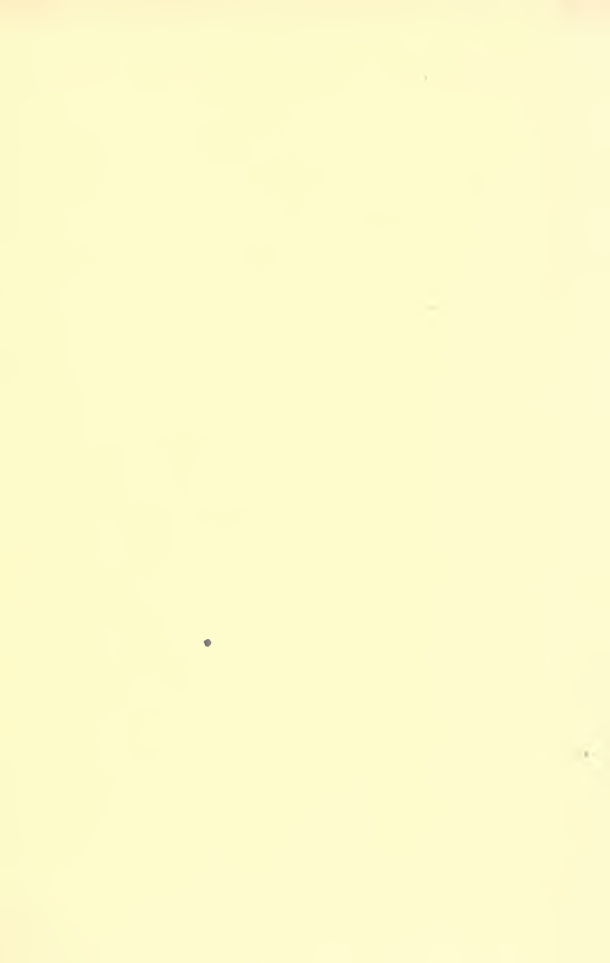






UNIVERSITY of CALIFORNIA
AT





Bits of Gossip

Bits of Gossip

By

Rebecca Harding Davis

Author of "Silhouettes of American Life"

"Doctor Warrick's Daughters"



Boston and New York
Houghton, Mifflin & Company
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1904

135952

COPYRIGHT 1904 BY REBECCA HARDING DAVIS
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Published October 1904

ANNOUNCED TO THE
WORLD BY THE
PUBLISHERS

IT always has seemed to me that each human being, before going out into the silence, should leave behind him, not the story of his own life, but of the time in which he lived, — as he saw it, — its creed, its purpose, its queer habits, and the work which it did or left undone in the world.

Taken singly, these accounts might be weak and trivial, but together, they would make history live and breathe. Think what flesh and color the diaries of an English tailor and an Italian vagabond have given to their times!

Some such vague consideration as this has made me collect these scattered remembrances of my own generation, and of some of the men and women in it whom I have known.

I have, of course, only spoken of the dead, whose work is done.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. IN THE OLD HOUSE	I
II. BOSTON IN THE SIXTIES	28
III. IN THE FAR SOUTH	65
IV. THE SCOTCH-IRISHMAN	84
V. THE CIVIL WAR	109
VI. THE SHIPWRECKED CREW	140
VII. A PECULIAR PEOPLE	161
VIII. ABOVE THEIR FELLOWS	196

BITS OF GOSSIP

I

IN THE OLD HOUSE

THE world that we lived in when I was a child would seem silent and empty to this generation. There were no railways in it, no automobiles or trolleys, no telegraphs, no sky-scraping houses. Not a single man in the country was the possessor of huge accumulations of money such as are so common now. There was not, from sea to sea, a trust or a labor union. Even the names of those things had not yet been invented.

The village in Virginia which was our home consisted of two sleepy streets lined with Lombardy poplars, creeping between a slow-moving river and silent, brooding hills. Important news from the world outside was brought to us when necessary by a man on a galloping horse.

But such haste seldom was thought necessary. Nobody was in a hurry to hear the

Bits of Gossip

news. Nobody was in a hurry to do anything, least of all to work or to make money. It mattered little then whether you had money or not. If you were born into a good family, and were "converted," you were considered safe for this world and the next.

Incomes were all small alike. Indeed, among gentlefolk it was considered vulgar to talk of money at all — either to boast that you had it, or to complain of your lack of it. This was a peculiar trait of the times, and, I suspect, grew out of one dogma of the religious training which then was universal. Every child was taught from his cradle that money was Mammon, the chief agent of the flesh and the devil. As he grew up it was his duty as a Christian and a gentleman to appear to despise filthy lucre, whatever his secret opinion of it might be.

Besides, the country was so new, so raw, that there were few uses for wealth. You must remember that in the early thirties Philadelphia, New York, and Boston were in the same condition as to population, wealth, and habits of life as the fourth-rate country

In the Old House

town of to-day. Richmond and St. Louis boasted loudly of their eight thousand inhabitants. San Francisco was a bear den, and Chicago a hamlet. The majority of Americans, both men and women, were then busy with farming or other manual labor, and the so-called gentry had no operas, no art galleries, no yearly trips to Europe to drain their thin incomes.

Between the small towns scattered over the continent stretched the wilderness, broken here and there by the farms of squatters. Through this wilderness the rivers, canals, and one solitary road carried travelers and trade.

Our village was built on the Ohio River, and was a halting place on this great national road, then the only avenue of traffic between the South and the North. Every morning two stage-coaches with prancing horses and shrill horns dashed down the sleeping streets to the wharf, full of passengers from the East, who hurried on board the steamboats bound for St. Louis or New Orleans. Huge vans often passed, laden with merchandise for

Bits of Gossip

the plantations or with bales of cotton for the Northern mills. Now and then a white-topped Conestoga wagon drawn by eight horses, each carrying a chime of bells, came through the streets, bearing an emigrant family to the West. The mother and children peeped out of the high front, and the father, carrying a gun, walked with his dog. These emigrants often were from Norway or Poland or Germany, and wore their national costumes, as European peasants still did then. They put on their velvet jackets and high caps when they came near the town, and went about begging, in order to save the little hoard of money which they had brought with them until they reached "the Ohio," as the whole West was then vaguely called.

These wagons were full of romance to us children. They came up with these strange people out of far-off lands of mystery, and took them into the wilderness, full of raging bears and panthers and painted warriors, all to be fought in turn. We used to look after the children peeping out at us with bitter envy; for, naturally, as we never left home, the

In the Old House

world outside of our encircling hills was a vast secret to us. Boys and girls now usually rush in the course of every year through a dozen states, to the mountains or the sea-coast. Most of them have been to Europe. Every morning before breakfast they can read what happened yesterday in Korea or South Africa.

But with us, after a presidential election, a month often passed before the man on a galloping horse brought us the name of the successful candidate.

Honest old Timothy Flint, in his "Account of the United States," published at that time, boasts that "the immense number of fifteen hundred newspapers and periodicals are now published in this country." Of these I only remember two, the "United States Gazette" and the "Gentleman's Monthly Magazine," which was always expurgated for my use by pinning certain pages together.

You may guess from these hints how isolated and calm life was in that time. The development of a child then was as different a process from the same work now, as is the

Bits of Gossip

growth of an acorn which falls in a forest and slowly thrusts out its root and leaf into earth and sun, from the culture of a thousand seedlings massed and tended in a hothouse.

My easy-going generation did not push the world's work on very far perhaps; we did not discover wireless telegraphy, nor radium. But neither did we die of nerve prostration.

Certain things were close and real to us then, as children, which to boys and girls now are misty legends. What do they care for the Revolution or the Indian wars?

But then, the smoke of the battles of Monmouth and Yorktown was still in the air. The old Indian forts were still standing in the streets. It was part of your religion to hate the British. It was your own grandfather who, when he was ten years old, had gone into the swamp, killed the huge beast that had threatened the settlement, and so won the proud title of Panther Jim. He showed you the very sword which he had carried at Valley Forge. It was your own grandmother who had danced with Lafayette, and who hinted that "Lady Washington" had an ugly

In the Old House

habit of loudly scolding her husband and of boxing Nelly Custis's ears, which was hardly befitting a gentlewoman.

These things made you feel that you had rocked the cradle of the new-born nation with your own hand. It was your duty to hate the British.

Another odd peculiarity of that time, which I never have seen noticed, was our familiarity with the heathen gods and goddesses. If you talked of war you said Mars, of a beautiful woman you called her Venus; you accused your rhyming neighbor of "courting the Nine." Sermons, letters, and ordinary talk were larded with scraps of Latin and Greek, which now would be laughed at. The reason is plain. Then, the educated boy and girl, first of all, must study the classics. Science, geography, even the history of their own people, were but secondary matters. Jupiter, Juno, and Cæsar still held the stage. The rest of the world as yet were behind the curtain.

But perhaps if I tell you some trifling incidents of my own childhood, they will show

Bits of Gossip

you more clearly the difference between life then and now. These little happenings are quite true except in the names of persons and places.

The house in which we children lived may have seemed very plain and homely to other people, but it had certain mysterious peculiarities which put it, for us, alongside of Macbeth's Castle Glamis or the witch-haunted stronghold in Sintram. We know now that they were not mysteries, but they still give a certain significance to the old house which was then the background of our lives.

I don't remember now what taxes were paid on it, nor what was the condition of the plumbing, nor even how many chambers it had — but these things I always shall remember : —

In each room was a huge fire of bituminous coal. The black soot hung and swayed in the great chimneys like a mass of sable mosses, and, beneath, yellow and red and purple flames leaped up from an inky base of coal to reach them, while on this base, black and shining as jet, was a gray letter-

In the Old House

ing that incessantly formed itself almost into words and then crumbled away. You knew that the words, if you could read them, would tell you the secret of your life, and you would watch them late into the night, until you fell asleep and woke to watch again. But the words always crumbled away before you could read them.

These flames and gray ashes have burned always in my memory, and made the wood-fires, of which poets talk so much, seem thin and meaningless to me.

Then there were the hillocks in the garden, on which melons grew in summer, but which, in winter, turned into the Alps sheeted with glaciers. We always "made the ascent" just at dusk, equipped with alpenstocks and with bottles of spruce beer and brown jumbles. The alpenstocks and the cakes and the beer all were made with her own hands by our good Angel (though we called her by a better name than that): it was She who packed the cakes and little bottles into bags hung to our waists, and gave us our staffs and shut us out into the twilight to make our perilous

Bits of Gossip

journey, setting a candle in the window to light us home again across the icy mountain wastes.

The old house had its historic points, too. There were the big wooden chairs on which the three Indian chiefs had sat when they stopped to see my father on their way to Washington. These warriors were in state dress, their faces painted in scarlet streaks; they wore crowns of eagle feathers and robes embroidered with beads and quills. They were live horrors to remember for years, and to shiver over when you were in bed and the candles were out and you pulled the clothes over your head.

She urged us to come and welcome them and not to be outdone in good-breeding by savages. So we went into the room and sat on a row of chairs, stiff with terror when they laughed and grunted "papoose." One of us even carried a plate of our own jumbles to them, and the big warrior dumped cakes, plate and all, into the corner of his robe and carried them away. When they were going they turned on the threshold and the great

In the Old House

chief made a farewell speech. The meaning of that oration always remained a family mystery. Had he pronounced a curse or a blessing on us? Even at this late day I should really like to know what he did say.

Then there was that green field with its old trees at the right of the house in which — Something — had wailed and made moans the night when one of us lay dead. The night was clear, the moon being full. Every one of the family heard the strange sobbing and cries. But there was no living thing in the field, — nothing but the voice. No stranger not of our blood heard it.

But this we never talked of.

But of all the mysteries in that house the most real was Monsieur Jean Crapeaud.

There was a narrow high closet cut into the side of the dining-room chimney, of which the door was always kept locked. There were six shelves in it. On the lower three were medicines, almanacs, all the odds and ends of an orderly housekeeper's treasures; then came two shelves, empty, because

Bits of Gossip

they were too high for even grown folks to reach. And on the dark upper shelf which nobody could touch even by standing on the highest chair dwelt Monsieur Crapeaud.

I don't know who first told us of him or his history. We seemed to have known him always. He was an old nobleman, and had been driven out of France by Napoleon. Every day now he went forth for adventures. We were sure that there was no place in the world where fighting was going on that Monsieur Jean would not be found, in full armor, mounted on a gray steed, carrying a drawn sword and a banner blazoned with the lilies of France. But at night he always came home to his quarters on the top shelf. That was, of course, only the entrance to his citadel. Who could tell how many gilded salons and high towers and dungeons for his enemies he had there, back of the chimney? He was, we believed, but twelve inches high, and we saw no difficulty in his entertaining many guests in his small quarters. Naturally, the size of these nobles of France — *émigrés* — would have shrunken with their fortunes.

In the Old House

Barbara, our nurse, boasted that she had often seen them, and described them as perpetually busy with eating frogs' legs and smoking corn-cob pipes. We said nothing, but secretly we did not believe Barbara's story. That statement about cob pipes such as the negroes smoked lacked common-sense. We could not be taken in by it.

When we had anything especially good to eat, such as taffy or black cake, we would throw bits of it up to the upper shelf, and when the evening readings touched on wars or deeds of derring-do, we opened the closet door that Monsieur Jean might hear. I remember that in the midst of the great tournament in "Ivanhoe" somebody gasped in a whisper, "Maybe he was there!" The idea was so tremendous that we had to stop reading that night to think it over.

Nobody had ever seen Jean, and there was only one person in the house to whom he would speak. It was very seldom that we could persuade this friend of the exiled nobleman to seek an audience. When he consented, how our hearts throbbed and our feet grew cold as

Bits of Gossip

he would rise, lay down his cigar, and gravely unlock the closet door.

Three little taps. "Monsieur!"

Silence. Other taps. "Monsieur, will you permit the children to bid you good-evening?"

"Oui — oui!" in a shrill little voice, thin and sharp as the stab of a penknife. It came from the closet, from the floor, from the open window, and our blood ran cold as we listened.

"What would they ask of poor Jean Crapeaud?"

"Go on. Speak!" the interpreter would say, nodding solemnly to us.

That was the awful moment!

Usually the boldest boy would gasp, "Where did you fight to-day, General?"

Sometimes the answer was "With the Indians," or "Against the Turks," or, most blood-curdling of all, "In Africa, with lions." But he always quickly added: "I am tired now with the fight. I go to sleep. Bon soir, mes enfants" — the shrill pipe of a voice retreating up and up into the air.

"Bon soir, Monsieur," we would shout in chorus. Oh, the fearful joy and relief as the

In the Old House

last thin "Adieu" died out and the interpreter locked the door, invariably coughing violently.

I see now that the village was a picturesque old place. On a bluff by the river were the ruins of the fort in which the first settlers took shelter from the Indians. One of these first settlers was still living, long past eighty, and each year used to give a ball in his barnlike house, when he would appear in an old Continental uniform and bare feet. The descendants of these old hunters and surveyors then made up the rich class of most of the settlements. The pay of a surveyor in Washington's day usually was as much land as he could ride around in a given time. During the first century land appreciated rapidly in value. Many of the most influential families in the South and Middle West to-day might adopt a galloping pony as their crest with accuracy.

In some of our old houses lived quiet folk, who frowned upon balls and card parties. In each of their households were a few slaves, some family portraits and plate, a shelf or two of Latin and English classics — and very little money. The owners stood as serenely secure

Bits of Gossip

on their pedigree as though they traced their blood back through nobles of Castile for fifty generations. They had a fine simplicity and gentleness of speech which I remember as I do songs heard in my childhood. Father Vaughan, the Catholic priest, was one of them, and Doctor Morris, the old Episcopal minister, who christened and married and buried us all — was another. The two men used to meet sometimes in our house, but they were formal and stately to each other as to nobody else, and neither man ever spoke of religion when the other was by.

In the largest of the old houses lived Colonel Richard Stuart. The colonel was the only man I ever saw who wore knee breeches and a queue. Mistress Stuart, too, when she came to drink tea with us, wore a velvet gown with ruby buttons, and a lawn turban folded above her whiter hair. They were a most simple-minded, gentle old couple, and, being childless, were happy when we visited them, and they could stuff us with plum-cake and syllabub. Yet we always felt that they were not quite real human beings, but had come down from that far-off age where

In the Old House

everything was old, where George Washington was the father of his country and Elijah was carried off to heaven in a fiery chariot.

Suddenly a mysterious disaster befell the old people. It never was explained to us. Even now I can but guess at the facts.

There was in the village a certain Squire Hiram McCall, our one man of business. The town was proud of him. We children used to hear men boast that "Hiram was a financier known from New York to St. Louis." "Hiram could hold his own on any exchange in the country." He was a loud-voiced, hook-nosed, keen-eyed man. We knew that he had a Bank and Capital. We used to hear him bragging on the street corners of his plans to make his fellow citizens rich. He never spoke to us, but would stumble over us and push us out of his way.

One day the whole town whispered together as at a funeral. Many of the women cried. We listened, of course, wherever we could. Some of the men we found "had gone on McCall's paper" — whatever that might be — "and were ruined. But the ruin of old

Bits of Gossip

Dick Stuart," they said, "was the most complete of all."

We hurried at once to the Stuart place and peeped through the fence. What was ruin? Were our old friends dead? No, there they were on the porch, and my mother was with them. Her face was pale and her eyes burned. She was urging them to take the benefit of some bankrupt law which Henry Clay had made for the help of poor debtors.

"Are you to starve in your old age," we heard her say, "to pay the debts of that villain?"

"I signed my name. I gave my word," was all that the old man said.

We thought it wiser to go home. She might look at the fence. But we were satisfied. If she and Henry Clay had taken the matter in hand it was all right.

There is a blur of time. Then came a day of horror. The Stuarts had nothing. The old man gave up houses, money, land — all; there was a terrible rumor that even the velvet gowns and ruby buttons were sent to Philadelphia and sold.

In the Old House

The story was told to us a hundred times. "You *must* understand," she said, the tears in her eyes. "The Colonel is penniless and homeless. But he has kept his honor!" She urged us to take this thing to heart and when we were grown up to go and do likewise.

I don't think the lesson struck home. Honor, with no house, nor plum-cake, nor knee-breeches, looks mean and cold when one is nine years old. Later we heard that the Colonel had asked for, and been given, the post of toll-gate keeper on the turnpike, and was actually there, taking the tolls.

For years after that, on every fair Sunday afternoon we were dressed and taken to the toll-house to "pay our respects." There was always a certain solemnity in the visit, something like a presentation at court. The whole town delighted to honor the old people. You always found some of their friends on the vine-covered little porch, where Mistress Stuart sat in her soft gray gown. There was no lawn turban now to hide her white hair. But the Colonel still wore his knee-breeches and queue. This comforted us greatly. The

Bits of Gossip

toll-gate was on a lonely mountain road. Hours might pass before a wagon or horseman would be seen coming up out of the fog. But then it was a fine sight to see the Colonel lay down his pipe, step solemnly out on the road, and taking off his hat pass the time of day with the traveler, while the "levy" or "fip" was handed to him.

His story was known throughout that part of Virginia and great reverence was shown by all passers-by to the old gate-keeper.

Another figure belonging to our first days in the world was "Knocky-luft." I heard, forty years later, that her real name was Cathy Warren, and that long before I was born she had come from County Cork with her boy Jim to seek their fortune here. Jim went on to the West and his mother waited in our village for him to come back with the fortune. I remember her chubby face and blue eyes often bent greedily over some new gown or hat of my mother's. "Ah-h!" she would mutter, with breathless delight. "I do be thinkin' Jim would be cravin' the like for his old Knocky-luft when he comes back

In the Old House

wid his big bags of goold! He 's such a fool boy!"

Jim wrote one day that he was "pushin' on to the Rockies and would write again when he came back."

Long before our childhood Knocky was waiting for that letter. Still waiting, she grew, as the years went by, into a lean, yellow old woman, with a red nose and hungry, frightened eyes. Every day she stopped at the house on her way down the street.

"Where are you going, Knocky?" we always cried.

"To the po — stoffis, children," she would say, with dignity. "There 'll be a letter to-day from my son James, I 'm thinkin'."

We used to watch for her at the garden gate as she crept back again, to comfort her with a plate of good things saved from the midday meal. If we could show her, too, a gay gown or bit of finery the cure was complete. She would turn it over and over eagerly shaking her head, muttering: "I doubt I 'm too old — I don't want to be redickelous. But Jim 'll be havin' his own way! He allays

Bits of Gossip

called me his pretty Knock." Then she would go away, cheerfully calling out that we would see her in the morning.

As years went by she grew more lean and gray and silent. At last she gave up work altogether. Nobody dared to offer her alms. I remember the shudder that went through the family when we heard that she had left her snug little room and was living in a hut on the Commons. We knew now that she had given up hope and had gone out there to die.

The Commons was the plague spot of the village, a collection of wretched cabins tenanted by drunken free negroes and Irish. Among its other horrors were goats and jimson weeds and a foul pond covered with yellow slime.

Knocky-luft found shelter in one of these hovels. Never by a word did she hint that her hope was gone, or that she had lost faith in Jim.

Every morning she crept down to the post-office and back again. There was a certain drunken old hag known in the village as Widdy Kate, who sometimes followed her

In the Old House

with jeers, desiring to know whether "her ladyship's son was coming to-day in his char-yut an' six?"

Knocky took refuge from her in our garden one day. "To think, childher," she cried, "that I've sunk down to livin' in the same house wid Widdy Kate! Only she has the big room an' I hev the kitchen!"

How could we comfort such misery as that? It was raining. We dragged her into the house and showed her my new frock of nan-kin embroidered in linen floss. That was comforting, and when we reached the pantry and displayed a row of smoking mince pies — Knocky was laughing.

It was Thanksgiving Day.

We tried to make this clear to Knocky, with the pies, real and smoking, in sight. But she grew restless again.

"What for shud *I* be thankin' God?" she cried. "Christmas I know, an' the battle of N-Yorleens, an' the Fourth of July I know. But I can't be givin' thanks — I'll go home, childher. No, I want no dinner."

She would not even take a pie. We tried

Bits of Gossip

to hold her back, but she shook us off and went down the street under the dripping trees again, back to her home with Kate. We were still, I remember, at the window looking miserably out at the rain when my mother came up the path. She was very pale and she held something white in her hand.

“Is Knocky here?” she said. “It is the letter from Jim.”

“Jim” came that afternoon. He was a stout, oldish man, with a worn face but kind eyes. He was handsomely dressed, and stated to my father that he had grown rich in the West and had come to take his mother home. “I’ll make her happy!” he said. Why he had not come before I do not know to this day.

Feeling that the Commons was the centre of public interest, we found our way there in the afternoon, braving the terrors of Widdy Kate and the butting billy-goats. Knocky saw us far off. “Come in, childher!” she called. “Come in. It’s Jim! I mean it’s my son, Mr.” —

She stopped and looked at him. She was

In the Old House

frightened, uncertain. He stroked her hand gently, humoring her like a baby.

“Yes, it’s Jim. I came a little while ago, you know, mother.”

Knocky started up. “Look at my gown, childher! Silk, d’ye see, as ud stan’ alone! Jim had it made up in the latest fashion. An’ the lace in the bosom, d’ye see? An’ flowin’ sleeves! An’ the goold watch!”

“I thought she’d be pleased,” he said awkwardly, looking at us.

“I’ll tell ye what’ll plaze me!” she cried shrilly. “If you’ll go out I’ll put them all on. An’ Jim’ll get a carriage — an open phayton like a charyut an’ two horses an’ we’ll drive past Widdy Kate’s dure through the streets to the Travelers’ Inn, an’ we’ll take dinner there!”

“Very well, mother,” said her son, watching her uneasily.

“You’ve got enough money? None but rich folks can dine at the Travelers’ Inn. They drink wine for dinner. Can we have wine? An’ you’ll drive slow through the streets. Past the po — stoffis! I want to stop an’ tell them that my letter’s come!”

Bits of Gossip

Jim came out with us and shut the door. We took time to notice that he looked white and sick and that Widdy Kate was waiting with all the other neighbors at the pond, and then we scurried home to tell the news.

An hour later we saw the phaeton making its triumphal way down the street. The sun had come out and shone on the wet trees.

Suddenly the horses stopped. Jim jumped out of the phaeton and lifted Knocky-luft in his arms. He carried her into a house.

“She is not well!” he cried. “Where is a doctor!”

In a minute she was lying on a couch and they were rubbing her hands, and I was running for old Doctor Tanner, whose shop (with the terrible skeleton) was at the back of our garden.

Then everybody knew and came. When they saw Knocky the men took off their hats and the women cried and went out again. Doctor Morris, our old minister, came up the path, thinking that he was needed, but seeing who it was he ran to find Father Vaughan.

In the Old House

“It is you who is wanted,” he cried. “Go—make haste!”

All this time Knocky was looking at Jim. When I saw her eyes I thought, “She knows him now!”

“Dear boy!” she whispered, “you’ve come!”

He was holding her in his arms. Presently he kissed her and laid her down.

“I came too late,” he said, and went out to another room.

II

BOSTON IN THE SIXTIES

IN the garden of our old house there were some huge cherry-trees, with low growing branches, and in one of them our nurse, Barbara, having an architectural turn of mind, once built me a house. Really, even now, old as I am, and after I have seen St. James's and the Vatican, I can't imagine any house as satisfactory as Barbara's.

You went up as far as you could by a ladder to the dizzy height of twelve feet, and then you kicked the ladder down and climbed on, up and up, breathless with terror and triumph, and — there it was. All your own. Not a boy had ever heard of it. There was a plank nailed in for the floor and another for a seat, and there was a secret box with a lid. You could hide your baby in that box, if there were danger of an attack by the Indians, or you could store your provisions in

Boston in the Sixties

it in case you had been on a long journey in the wilderness, and had gained this refuge from the wolves in the jungle of currant bushes below. All around you, above and below, were the thick wall of green leaves and the red cherries. They were useful, in case there was danger of starving when the siege by the redskins or wild beasts lasted long.

After I had grown old enough to be ashamed of my dolls, or of looking for wolves in the currant bushes, I used to carry my two or three books up to the tree-house. There were but two or three books then for children; no magazines, nor Kiplings, nor Stevensons, nor any of the army of cheery storytellers who beset the young people to-day; only Bunyan and Miss Edgeworth and Sir Walter.

Still, when Apollyon roared in the celery pits below, and Mercy and Christiana sat under the locust-trees, and the tents and glittering legions of the crusaders stretched away to the hills, I don't know that any girl now, in a proper modern house, has better

Bits of Gossip

company than was mine up in Barbara's lodge.

One day I climbed up with a new book, the first cheap book, by the way, that I ever saw. It was in two volumes; the cover was of yellow paper and the name was "Moral Tales." The tales, for the most part, were thin and cheap as the paper; they commanded no enchanted company, bad or good, into the cherry-tree.

But among them were two or three unsigned stories which I read over so often that I almost know every line of them by heart now. One was a story told by a town-pump, and another the account of the rambles of a little girl like myself, and still another a description of a Sunday morning in a quiet town like our sleepy village. There was no talk of enchantment in them. But in these papers the commonplace folk and things which I saw every day took on a sudden mystery and charm, and, for the first time, I found that they, too, belonged to the magic world of knights and pilgrims and fiends.

The publisher of "Moral Tales," whoever

Boston in the Sixties

he was, had probably stolen these anonymous papers from the annuals in which they had appeared. Nobody called him to account. Their author was then, as he tells us somewhere, the "obscurest man of letters in America."

Years afterward, when he was known as the greatest of living romancers, I opened his "Twice-Told Tales" and found there my old friends with a shock of delight as keen as if I had met one of my own kinsfolk in the streets of a foreign city. In the first heat of my discovery I wrote to Mr. Hawthorne and told him about Barbara's house and of what he had done for the child who used to hide there. The little story, coming from the backwoods, touched his fancy, I suppose, for I presently received a note from him saying that he was then at Washington, and was coming on to Harper's Ferry, where John Brown had died, and still farther to see the cherry-trees and — me.

Me.

Well, I suppose Esther felt a little in that way when the king's sceptre touched her.

Bits of Gossip

I wish he had come to the old town. It would have seemed a different place forever after to many people. But we were in the midst of the Civil War, and the western end of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was seized just then by the Confederates, and he turned back.

A year later I saw him. It was during my first visit to New England, at the time when certain men and women were earning for Boston its claim to be called the modern Athens.

I wish I could summon these memorable ghosts before you as I saw them then and afterward. To the eyes of an observer, belonging to the commonplace world, they did not appear precisely as they do in the portraits drawn of them for posterity by their companions, the other Areopagites, who walked and talked with them apart — always apart from humanity.

That was the first peculiarity which struck an outsider in Emerson, Hawthorne, and the other members of the "Atlantic" coterie; that while they thought they were guiding the

Boston in the Sixties

real world, they stood quite outside of it, and never would see it as it was.

For instance, during the Civil War, they had much to say of it, and all used the same strained high note of exaltation. It was to them "only the shining track," as Lowell calls it, where

. . . "heroes mustered in a gleaming row,
Beautiful evermore, and with the rays
Of morn on their white shields of expectation."

These heroes were their bravest and their best, gone to die for the slave or for their country. They were "the army" to them.

I remember listening during one long summer morning to Louisa Alcott's father as he chanted pæans to the war, the "armed angel which was wakening the nation to a lofty life unknown before."

We were in the little parlor of the Wayside, Mr. Hawthorne's house in Concord. Mr. Alcott stood in front of the fireplace, his long gray hair streaming over his collar, his pale eyes turning quickly from one listener to another to hold them quiet, his hands waving to keep time with the orotund sentences

Bits of Gossip

which had a stale, familiar ring as if often repeated before. Mr. Emerson stood listening, his head sunk on his breast, with profound submissive attention, but Hawthorne sat astride of a chair, his arms folded on the back, his chin dropped on them, and his laughing, sagacious eyes watching us, full of mockery.

I had just come up from the border where I had seen the actual war; the filthy spewings of it; the political jobbery in Union and Confederate camps; the malignant personal hatreds wearing patriotic masks, and gluttoned by burning homes and outraged women; the chances in it, well improved on both sides, for brutish men to grow more brutish, and for honorable gentlemen to degenerate into thieves and sots. War may be an armed angel with a mission, but she has the personal habits of the slums. This would-be seer who was talking of it, and the real seer who listened, knew no more of war as it was, than I had done in my cherry-tree when I dreamed of bannered legions of crusaders debouching in the misty fields.

Mr. Hawthorne at last gathered himself up

Boston in the Sixties

lazily to his feet, and said quietly: "We cannot see that thing at so long a range. Let us go to dinner," and Mr. Alcott suddenly checked the droning flow of his prophecy and quickly led the way to the dining-room.

Early that morning when his lank, gray figure had first appeared at the gate, Mr. Hawthorne said: "Here comes the Sage of Concord. He is anxious to know what kind of human beings come up from the back hills in Virginia. Now I will tell you," his eyes gleaming with fun, "what he will talk to you about. Pears. Yes. You may begin at Plato or the day's news, and he will come around to pears. He is now convinced that a vegetable diet affects both the body and soul, and that pears exercise a more direct and ennobling influence on us than any other vegetable or fruit. Wait. You'll hear presently."

When we went in to dinner, therefore, I was surprised to see the sage eat heartily of the fine sirloin of beef set before us. But with the dessert he began to advocate a vegetable diet and at last announced the spiritual influence of pears, to the great delight of his

Bits of Gossip

host, who laughed like a boy and was humored like one by the gentle old man.

Whether Alcott, Emerson, and their disciples discussed pears or the war, their views gave you the same sense of unreality, of having been taken, as Hawthorne said, at too long a range. You heard much sound philosophy and many sublime guesses at the eternal verities; in fact, never were the eternal verities so dissected and pawed over and turned inside out as they were about that time, in Boston, by Margaret Fuller and her successors. But the discussion left you with a vague, uneasy sense that something was lacking, some back-bone of fact. Their theories were like beautiful bubbles blown from a child's pipe, floating overhead, with queer reflections on them of sky and earth and human beings, all in a glow of fairy color and all a little distorted.

Mr. Alcott once showed me an arbor which he had built with great pains and skill for Mr. Emerson to "do his thinking in." It was made of unbarked saplings and boughs, a tiny round temple, two storied, with chambers in

Boston in the Sixties

which were seats, a desk, etc., all very artistic and complete, except that he had forgotten to make any door. You could look at it and admire it, but nobody could go in or use it. It seemed to me a fitting symbol for this guild of prophets and their scheme of life.

Mr. Alcott at that time was their oracle, appointed and held in authority by Emerson alone. His faith in the old man was so sincere and simple that it was almost painful to see it.

He once told me, "I asked Alcott the other day what he would do when he came to the gate, and St. Peter demanded his ticket. 'What have you to show to justify your right to live?' I said. 'Where is your book, your picture? You have done nothing in the world.' 'No,' he said, 'but somewhere on a hill up there will be Plato and Paul and Socrates talking, and they will say: "Send Alcott over here, we want him with us."' And," said Emerson, gravely shaking his head, "he was right! Alcott was right."

Mr. Alcott was a tall, awkward, kindly old man, absolutely ignorant of the world, but

Bits of Gossip

with an obstinate faith in himself which would have befitted a pagan god. Hearing that I was from Virginia, he told me that he owed his education wholly to Virginian planters. He had traveled in his youth as a peddler through the State, and finding how eager he was to learn they would keep him for days in their houses, turning him loose in their libraries.

His own library was full of folios of his manuscripts. He had covered miles of paper with his inspirations, but when I first knew him no publisher had ever put a line of them into print. His house was bleak and bitter cold with poverty, his wife had always worked hard to feed him and his children. In any other town he would have been more respected if he had tried to put his poor carpentering skill to use to support them. But the homelier virtues were not, apparently, in vogue in Concord.

During my first visit to Boston in 1862, I saw at an evening reception a tall, thin young woman standing alone in a corner. She was plainly dressed, and had that watchful, defiant

Boston in the Sixties

air with which the woman whose youth is slipping away is apt to face the world which has offered no place to her. Presently she came up to me.

“These people may say pleasant things to you,” she said abruptly; “but not one of them would have gone to Concord and back to see you, as I did to-day. I went for this gown. It’s the only decent one I have. I’m very poor;” and in the next breath she contrived to tell me that she had once taken a place as “second girl.” “My name,” she added, “is Louisa Alcott.”

Now, although we had never met, Louisa Alcott had shown me great kindness in the winter just past, sacrificing a whole day to a tedious work which was to give me pleasure at a time when every hour counted largely to her in her desperate struggle to keep her family from want. The little act was so considerate and fine, that I am still grateful for it, now when I am an old woman, and Louisa Alcott has long been dead. It was as natural for her to do such things as for a pomegranate-tree to bear fruit.

Bits of Gossip

Before I met her I had known many women and girls who were fighting with poverty and loneliness, wondering why God had sent them into a life where apparently there was no place for them, but never one so big and generous in soul as this one in her poor scant best gown, the "claret-colored merino," which she tells of with such triumph in her diary. Amid her grim surroundings, she had the gracious instincts of a queen. It was her delight to give, to feed living creatures, to make them happy in body and soul.

She would so welcome you in her home to a butterless baked potato and a glass of milk that you would never forget the delicious feast. Or, if she had no potato or milk to offer, she would take you through the woods to the river, and tell you old legends of colony times, and be so witty and kind in the doing of it that the day would stand out in your memory ever after, differing from all other days, brimful of pleasure and comfort.

With this summer, however, the darkest hour of her life passed. A few months after I saw her she went as a nurse into the war,

Boston in the Sixties

and soon after wrote her "Hospital Sketches." Then she found her work and place in the world.

Years afterward she came to the city where I was living and I hurried to meet her. The lean, eager, defiant girl was gone, and instead, there came to greet me a large, portly, middle-aged woman, richly dressed. Everything about her, from her shrewd, calm eyes to the rustle of her satin gown told of assured success.

Yet I am sure fame and success counted for nothing with her except for the material aid which they enabled her to give to a few men and women whom she loved. She would have ground her bones to make their bread. Louisa Alcott wrote books which were true and fine, but she never imagined a life as noble as her own.

The altar for human sacrifices still stands and smokes in this Christian day of the world, and God apparently does not reject its offerings.

Of the group of famous people in Concord in 1862, Mr. Emerson was best known to the

Bits of Gossip

country at large. He was the typical Yankee in appearance. The tall, gaunt man, with the watchful, patient face and slightly dazed eyes, his hands clasped behind his back, that came slowly down the shady village street toward the Wayside that summer day, was Uncle Sam himself in ill-fitting brown clothes. I often have wondered that none of his biographers have noticed the likeness. Voice and look and manner were full of the most exquisite courtesy, yet I doubt whether he was conscious of his courtesy or meant to be deferential. Emerson, first of all, was a student of man, an explorer into the dim, obscure regions of human intelligence. He studied souls as a philologist does words, or an entomologist beetles. He approached each man with bent head and eager eyes. "What new thing shall I find here?" they said.

I went to Concord, a young woman from the backwoods, firm in the belief that Emerson was the first of living men. He was the modern Moses who had talked with God apart and could interpret Him to us.

When I heard him coming into the parlor

Boston in the Sixties

at the Wayside my body literally grew stiff and my tongue dry with awe. And in ten minutes I was telling him all that I had seen of the war, the words tumbling over each other, so convinced was I of his eagerness to hear. He was eager. If Edison had been there he would have been just as eager to wrench out of him the secret of electricity, or if it had been a freed slave he would have compelled him to show the scars on his back and lay bare his rejoicing, ignorant, half-animal soul, and an hour later he would have forgotten that Edison or the negro or I were in the world — having taken from each what he wanted.

Naturally Mr. Emerson valued the abnormal freaks among human souls most highly, just as the unclassable word and the mongrel beetle are dearest to the grammarian or the naturalist. The only man to whose authority he bowed was Alcott, the vague, would-be prophet, whose ravings he did not pretend to fathom. He apparently shared in the popular belief that eccentricity was a sign of genius.

Bits of Gossip

He said to me suddenly once, "I wish Thoreau had not died before you came. He was an interesting study."

"Why?" I asked.

"Why? Thoreau?" He hesitated, thinking, going apparently to the bottom of the matter, and said presently: "Henry often reminded me of an animal in human form. He had the eye of a bird, the scent of a dog, the most acute, delicate intelligence — but no soul. No," he repeated, shaking his head with decision, "Henry could not have had a human soul."

His own perception of character was an intuition. He felt a fine trait as he would a fine strain of music. Coming once to Philadelphia, he said, almost as soon as he entered the house, "So Philip Randolph has gone! That man had the sweetest moral nature I ever knew. There never was a man so lacking in self-consciousness. The other day I saw in the London 'Times' that 'the American, Randolph, one of the three greatest chess players in the world was dead.' I knew Philip intimately since he was a boy, and I

Boston in the Sixties

never heard him mention the game. I did not even know that he played it. How fine that was!" he said, walking up and down the room. "How fine that was!"

Emerson himself was as little likely to parade his merits as Randolph, but not from any lack of self-appreciation. On the contrary, his interest in his Ego was so dominant that it probably never occurred to him to ask what others thought of him. He took from each man his drop of stored honey, and after that the man counted for no more to him than any other robbed bee. I do not think that even the worship which his disciples gave him interested him enough to either amuse or annoy him.

It was worship. No such homage has ever been paid to any American. His teaching influenced at once the trend of thought here and in England; the strongest men then living became promptly his disciples or his active antagonists.

But outside of this central circle of scholars and original thinkers, there were vast outlying provinces of intelligence where he reigned

Bits of Gossip

absolutely as does the unseen Grand Llama over his adoring votaries. New England then swarmed with weak-brained, imitative folk who had studied books with more or less zeal, and who knew nothing of actual life. They were suffering under the curse of an education which they could not use; they were the lean, underfed men and women of villages and farms, who were trained enough to be lawyers and teachers in their communities, but who actually were cobblers, mill-hands, or tailoresses. They had revolted from Puritanism, not to enter any other live church, but to fall into a dull disgust, a nausea with all religion. To them came this new prophet with his discovery of the God within themselves. They hailed it with acclamation. The new dialect of the Transcendentalist was easily learned. They talked it as correctly as the Chinaman does his pigeon English. Up to the old gray house among the pines in Concord they went — hordes of wild-eyed Harvard undergraduates and lean, underpaid working-women, each with a disease of soul to be cured by the new Healer.

Boston in the Sixties

It is quite impossible to give to the present generation an idea of the devout faith of these people. Keen-witted and scholarly as some of them were, it was as absolute as that of the poor Irishman tramping over the bogs in Munster to cure his ailments by a drink of the water of a holy well.

Outside of these circles of disciples there was then throughout the country a certain vague pride in Emerson as an American prophet. We were in the first flush of our triumph in the beginnings of a national literature. We talked much of it. Irving, Prescott, and Longfellow had been English, we said, but these new men — Holmes and Lowell and Hawthorne — were our own, the indigenous growth of the soil. In the West and South there was no definite idea as to what truth this Concord man had brought into the world. But in any case it was American truth and not English. Emerson's popularity, therefore, outside of New England was wide, but vague and impersonal.

It was very different with Dr. Holmes.

Bits of Gossip

Everybody who cared for books, whether in New York clubs, California ranches, or Pennsylvania farms, loved and laughed with "the little doctor," as he was fondly called. They discussed his queer ways and quoted his last jokes as if he had been the autocrat at their own breakfast-table that morning. His output of occasional verses was enormous and constant. The present generation, probably, regard most of them as paste jewels, but they shone for us, the purest of gems. He was literally the autocrat of the young men and women of his time. He opened the depths of their own hearts to them as nobody else had done, and they ran to him to pour out their secrets. Letters—hundreds in a day—rained down on him with confidences, tragic, pathetic, and ridiculous, but all true. The little man was alive with magnetism; it fired his feeblest verse, and drew many men and all women to him.

Physically, he was a very small man, holding himself stiffly erect—his face insignificant as his figure, except for a long, obstinate upper lip ("left to me," he said one day, "by

Boston in the Sixties

some ill-conditioned great-grandmother"), and eyes full of a wonderful fire and sympathy. No one on whom Dr. Holmes had once looked with interest ever forgot the look — or him. He attracted all kinds of people as a brilliant, excitable child would attract them. But nobody, I suspect, ever succeeded in being familiar with him.

Americans at that time seldom talked of distinction of class or descent. You were only truly patriotic if you had a laborer for a grandfather and were glad of it. But the Autocrat was patrician enough to represent the descent of a daimio, with two thousand years of ancestry behind him. He was the finest fruit of that Brahmin order of New England which he first had classified and christened. He had too keen an appreciation of genius not to recognize his own. He enjoyed his work as much as his most fervent admirers, and openly enjoyed, too, their applause. I remember one evening that he quoted one of his poems, and I was forced stupidly to acknowledge that I did not know it. He fairly jumped to the book-cases, took out the volume and read the

Bits of Gossip

verses, standing in the middle of the room, his voice trembling, his whole body thrilling with their meaning.

“There!” he cried at the end, his eyes flashing, “could anybody have said that better? Ah-h!” with a long, indrawn breath of delight as he put the book back.

He had the fervor, the irritability, the tenderness of a woman, and her whimsical fancies, too. He was, unlike women, eager to help you out with your unreasonable whims. One day I happened to confess to a liking for old graveyards and the strange bits of human history to be found or guessed at in them. The result was that he became my cicerone the next day to Mount Auburn. It was an odd bit of luck to fall to a young woman from the hills that she should have the Autocrat, to whom the whole country was paying homage, all to herself for a whole summer morning. He took me to none of the costly monuments, nor graves of famous folk, but wandered here and there among the trees, his hands clasped behind him, stopping now and then at a green mound, while he told me curious fragments

Boston in the Sixties

of the life which was ended below. He mentioned no names — they would have meant nothing to me if he had — but he wrested the secret meaning out of each life, pouncing on it, holding it up with a certain racy enjoyment in his own astuteness. It was a marvelous monologue, full of keen wit and delicate sympathy and acrid shrewdness. I must confess that I think he forgot the country and its homage and me that morning, and talked simply for his own pleasure in his own pathos and fun, just as a woman might take out her jewels when she was alone, to hold up the glittering strings and take delight in their shining. Once, I remember, he halted by a magnificent shaft and read the bead roll of the virtues of the man who lay beneath: "A devoted husband, a tender father, a noble citizen — dying triumphant in the Christian faith."

"Now this dead man," he said, in a high, rasping tone, "was a prize fighter, a drunkard, and a thief. He beat his wife. But she puts up this stone. He had money!"

Then he hurried me across the slopes to an obscure corner where a grave was hidden by

Bits of Gossip

high, wild grasses. He knelt and parted the long branches. Under them was a little headstone with the initials "M. H.," and underneath the verse:—

She lived unknown and
few could know
When Mary ceased to be,
But she is gone, and Oh!
The difference to me!

"Do you see this?" he asked, in a whisper.

"Do you know who she was?" I asked.

"No, I would n't try to find out. I'd like to know, but I could n't uncover that grave. No, no! I could n't do that."

He put back the leaves reverently so as to hide the stone again and rose, and as he turned away I saw that the tears stood in his eyes.

As we drove home he said: "I believe that I know every grave in the old villages within a radius of thirty miles from Boston. I search out the histories of these forgotten folk in records and traditions, and sometimes I find strange things—oh, very strange things! When I have found out all about them they

Boston in the Sixties

seem like my own friends, lying there forgotten. But I know them! And every spring, as soon as the grass begins to come up, I go my rounds to visit them and see how my dead men do!"

But with all his whims Dr. Holmes was no unpractical dreamer like his friends in Concord. He was far in advance of his time in certain shrewd, practical plans for the bettering of the conditions of American life.

One of his hobbies was a belief in a hobby as an escape valve in the over-heated, over-driven career of a brain worker.

The doctrine was almost new then. The pace of life was as yet tranquil and moderate compared to the present headlong American race. But the doctor foresaw what was coming — both the danger and its remedy.

His camera and violin were two of his own doors of escape from work and worry. Under his library table, too, was a little box, furnished with a jig-saw, lathe, etc. It ran in and out on grooves, like a car on a railway. He showed it one day with triumph.

"I contrived that!" he said. "But only

Bits of Gossip

my friends know about it. People think I am shut in here, hard at work, writing poetry or lectures. And I am making jim-cracks. But if any of the dunces make their way in, I give it a shove — so! Away it goes under the table and I am discovered — Poet or Professor, in character — pen in hand!” and he chuckled like a naughty boy over his successful trick.

Holmes, Longfellow, Emerson, and George Ticknor, all chiefs of differing literary clans, formed a fraternity then in New England which never since has found its parallel in America.

There can be no doubt that their success as individuals or as a body in influencing American thought was largely due to their friend and neighbor, James T. Fields, the shrewdest of publishers and kindest of men. He was the wire that conducted the lightning so that it never struck amiss.

His little house in Charles Street, with the pretty garden sloping to the river, was then the shelter to which hied all wandering men of letters, from Thackeray and Dickens down

Boston in the Sixties

to starving poets from the western prairies.

They were wisely counseled and sent upon the right path, but not until they had been warmed and fed in body and mind. Mr. Fields was a keen man of business, but he had a kindly, hospitable soul.

Hawthorne was in the Boston fraternity but not of it. He was an alien among these men, not of their kind. He belonged to no tribe. I am sure that wherever he went during his whole life, from the grassy streets of Salem to the docks of Liverpool, on Parisian boulevards or in the olive groves of Belosguardo, he was always a foreigner, different from his neighbors. He probably never knew that he was different. He knew and cared little about Nathaniel Hawthorne, or indeed about the people around him. The man next door interested him no more than the man in Mozambique. He walked through life, talking and thinking to himself in a language which we do not understand.

It has happened to me to meet many of the men of my day whom the world agreed

Bits of Gossip

to call great. I have found that most of these royalties seem to sink into ordinary citizens at close approach.

You will find the poet who wrings the heart of the world, or the foremost captain of his time, driving a bargain or paring a potato, just as you would do. You are disappointed in every word and look from them. You expect to see the divine light shining through their talk to the office-boy or the train-man, and you never catch a glimmer of it; you are aggrieved because their coats and trousers have not something of the cut of kingly robes.

Hawthorne only, of them all, always stood aloof. Even in his own house he was like Banquo's ghost among the thanes at the banquet.

There is an old Cornish legend that a certain tribe of mountain spirits were once destroyed by the trolls, all except one, who still wanders through the earth looking for his own people and never finding them. I never looked at Hawthorne without remembering the old story.

Personally he was a rather short, power-

Boston in the Sixties

fully built man, gentle and low voiced, with a sly, elusive humor gleaming sometimes in his watchful gray eyes. The portrait with which we all are familiar — a curled barber-shop head — gives no idea of the singular melancholy charm of his face. There was a mysterious power in it which I never have seen elsewhere in picture, statue, or human being.

Wayside, the home of the Hawthornes in Concord, was a comfortable little house on a shady, grassy road. To please his wife he had built an addition to it, a tower into which he could climb, locking out the world below, and underneath, a little parlor, in whose dainty new furnishings Mrs. Hawthorne took a womanish delight. Yet, somehow, gay Brussels rugs and gilded frames were not the background for the morbid, silent recluse.

Mrs. Hawthorne, however, made few such mistakes. She was a soft, affectionate, feminine little woman, with intuitions subtle enough to follow her husband into his darkest moods, but with, too, a cheerful, practical

Bits of Gossip

Yankee "capacity" which fitted her to meet baker and butcher. Nobody could have been better fitted to stand between Hawthorne and the world. She did it effectively. When I was at Wayside, they had been living there for two years — ever since their return from Europe, and I was told that in that time he had never once been seen on the village street.

This habit of seclusion was a family trait. Hawthorne's mother had managed to live the life of a hermit in busy Salem, and her sister, meeting a disappointment in early life, had gone into her chamber, and for more than twenty years shut herself up from her kind, and dug into her own soul to find there what truth and life she could. During the years in which Nathaniel, then a young man, lived with these two women, he, too, chose to be alone, going out of the house only at night, and finding his food on a plate left at his locked door. Sometimes weeks passed during which the three inmates of the little gray wooden house never saw each other.

Boston in the Sixties

Hawthorne was the product of generations of solitude and silence. No wonder that he had the second sight and was naturalized into the world of ghosts and could interpret for us their speech.

America may have great poets and novelists, but she never will have more than one necromancer.

The natural feeling among healthy, commonplace people toward the solitary man was a tender sympathy such as they would give to a sick child.

“Nathaniel,” an old blacksmith in Salem once said to me, “was queer even as a boy. He certainly was queer. But you humored him. You *wanted* to humor him.”

One person, however, had no mind to humor him. This was Miss Elizabeth Peabody, Mrs. Hawthorne's sister. She was the mother of the kindergarten in this country, and gave to its cause, which seemed to her first in importance, a long and patient life of noble self-sacrifice. She was a woman of wide research and a really fine intelligence, but she had the discretion of a six-year-old child.

Bits of Gossip

She loved to tell the details of Hawthorne's courtship of her sister, and of how she herself had unearthed him from the tomb of the little gray house in Salem, and "brought him into Sophia's presence." She still regarded him as a demi-god, but a demi-god who required to be fed, tutored, and kept in order. It was her mission, she felt, to bring him out from solitudes where he walked apart, to the broad ways of common sense.

I happened to be present at her grand and last *coup* to this end.

One evening I was with Mrs. Hawthorne in the little parlor when the children brought in their father. The windows were open, and we sat in the warm twilight quietly talking or silent as we chose. Suddenly Miss Peabody appeared in the doorway. She was a short, stout little woman, with her white stockinged feet thrust into slippers, her hoop skirt swaying from side to side, and her gray hair flying to the winds.

She lighted the lamp, went out and brought in more lamps, and then sat down and waited with an air of stern resolution.

Boston in the Sixties

Presently Mr. Emerson and his daughter appeared, then Louisa Alcott and her father, then two gray old clergymen who were formally presented to Mr. Hawthorne, who now looked about him with terrified dismay. We saw other figures approaching in the road outside.

“What does this mean, Elizabeth?” Mrs. Hawthorne asked aside.

“I did it. I went around and asked a few people in to meet our friend here. I ordered some cake and lemonade, too.”

Her blue eyes glittered with triumph as Mrs. Hawthorne turned away. “They’ve been here two years,” she whispered, “and nobody has met Mr. Hawthorne. People talk. It’s ridiculous! There’s no reason why Sophia should not go into society. So I just made an excuse of your visit to bring them in.”

Miss Elizabeth has been for many years among the sages and saints on the heavenly hills, but I have not yet quite forgiven her the misery of that moment.

The little room was quite full when there

Bits of Gossip

rustled in a woman who came straight to Mr. Hawthorne, as a vulture to its prey. I never heard her name, but I knew her at sight as the intellectual woman of the village, the Intelligent Questioner who crows you into idiocy by her fluent cleverness.

“So delighted to meet you *at last!*” she said, seating herself beside him. “I have always admired your books, Mr. Hawthorne. I was one of the very first to recognize your power. And now I want you to tell me about your methods of work. I want to hear all about it.”

But at that moment his wife came up and said that he was wanted outside, and he escaped. A few moments later I heard his steps on the floor overhead, and knew that he was safe in the tower for the night.

.

He did not hold me guilty in the matter, for the next morning he joined his wife and me in a walk through the fields. We went to the Old Manse where they had lived when they were first married, and then wandered on to the wooded slopes of the Sleepy Hollow Val-

Boston in the Sixties

ley in which the Concord people had begun to lay away their dead.

It was a cool morning, with soft mists rolling up the hills, and flashes between of sudden sunlight. The air was full of pungent woody smells, and the undergrowth blushed pink with blossoms. There was no look of a cemetery about the place. Here and there, in a shady nook, was a green hillock like a bed, as if some tired traveler had chosen a quiet place for himself and lain down to sleep.

Mr. Hawthorne sat down in the deep grass and then, clasping his hands about his knees, looked up laughing.

"Yes," he said, "we New Englanders begin to enjoy ourselves — when we are dead."

As we walked back the mists gathered and the day darkened overhead. Hawthorne, who had been joking like a boy, grew suddenly silent, and before we reached home the cloud had settled down again upon him, and his steps lagged heavily.

Even the faithful woman who kept always close to his side with her laughing words and anxious eyes did not know that day how

Bits of Gossip

fast the last shadows were closing in upon him.

In a few months he was lying under the deep grass, at rest, near the very spot where he sat and laughed, looking up at us.

I left Concord that evening and never saw him again. He said good-by, hesitated shyly, and then, holding out his hand, said: —

“I am sorry you are going away. It seems as if we had known you always.”

The words were nothing. I suppose he forgot them and me as he turned into the house. And yet, because perhaps of the child in the cherry-tree, and the touch which the Magician laid upon her, I never have forgotten them. They seemed to take me, too, for one moment, into his enchanted country.

Of the many pleasant things which have come into my life, this was one of the pleasantest and best.

III

IN THE FAR SOUTH

BEFORE we came to Virginia we lived in one of the Gulf States, in a district given up to cotton plantations. In the middle of these plantations, in a wide basin formed by the sloping hills, lay the village of Big Spring. Near it was the spring, a huge gush of brown water which made itself into a creek and lapped its crooked way through the woods. The principal house was a store where everything could be bought, from a plow to stale sugar-plums, and the pelts brought by the Indian tribe that still lingered on the other side of the hills.

Along the grassy road which led from the store were the forge, the house of the horse-trader, the shoemaker's cabin, and the tavern, kept by Ody Peay. No decent traveler had ever been known to stay overnight in Ody's dirty, dark chambers. But the foremost men

Bits of Gossip

and the best judges of liquor in the State came to try his mint juleps and sherry cobblers. You would hear no better talk in the South than that which purred lazily along on a rainy afternoon on Ody's gallery.

This was the village. The woods crept in year by year as if they wanted to close down upon it altogether and smother out its torpid life; live oaks grew in the midst of the streets; the moss covered the roofs and edged the huge trough into which the water from the spring dripped, and about which the sleepy oxen stood in the hot sunshine and drank lazily.

Some of the planters who daily rode into town for a smoke and a gossip at Ody's were the descendants of good Protestant Irish families; and others, still Catholic, traced back their ancestry to French *émigrés* who had escaped the guillotine.

The planters were not energetic cotton-growers. Most of their capital and knowledge went into their stables, in which were some of the most famous running horses then in the country. Their owners traveled every

In the Far South

year with them and a great following of friends, jockeys, and grooms, to New Orleans and up to the northern race-courses.

The southern king of the turf, Gray Eagle, was partly owned by Major Delasco, one of our neighbors, though Kentucky claimed the great racer, and was as proud of him as of any of her sons, Marshall or Clay though he might be.

When Kentucky was challenged by Louisiana on the course in 1840, it was Gray Eagle who was chosen to uphold its honor. The whole country stood breathless as that race was run. The Major backed the horse with every dollar and acre that he owned. Thousands of Kentuckians risked their whole fortunes on him, and when it was certain that he would lose, not a man from that State, to save himself, would hedge or bet a penny against him. The ruin of many an old family dated from that race.

In his old age the great southern champion was taken by Major Delasco to the course at Lexington, where his chief triumphs had been won. When the races were over, the

Bits of Gossip

audience waited in silence while the old horse, blind and tottering, was led in. He was stripped; the bugle sounded the start. He understood. His sightless eyes kindled, his nostrils quivered as he was led around the course. Roar after roar of frantic shouts greeted him; every head was uncovered. He stepped slowly and proudly, his head high, his breath coming hard.

He knew that he was the conqueror, and that these were his friends come to welcome him. Twice he marched around the track, and then passed out of sight forever.

“He knows!” the Major said, as he led him out, patting him with a shaking hand. “He knows it’s the last time. He has bid the world good-by.” The tears ran down over his huge tobacco-stained jaws as he talked.

Gray Eagle died two days later.

I have often heard my mother describe the mixed magnificence and squalor of the life on the plantations among which we lived; the great one-storied wooden houses built on piles; the pits of mud below them in which the pigs wallowed; the masses of crimson

In the Far South

roses heaped high on the roofs, a blaze of pure and splendid color; the bare floors, not too often scrubbed; the massive buffets covered with magnificent plate, much of it cups and salvers won on the turf.

The women of these families did not lead the picturesque idle life which their northern sisters imagined and envied. Much of the day was spent in weighing provisions or cutting out clothes for the field hands. They had few books — an odd volume of poems and their Bibles, which they read devoutly — and no amusements but an occasional hot supper, to which they went in faded gowns of ancient cut. But their jewels, as a rule, were diamonds of great purity and value.

In our quiet life afterwards in Virginia, our sojourn in the far South was remembered as an uneasy dream. The thick shade of the semi-tropical forests, the mile-long hedges of roses through which crawled rattlesnakes and the deadly upland moccasin, the darting birds like jewels, the extravagant slovenliness of both nature and man, the fleas, the ticks, the chiggers, and countless other creatures that

Bits of Gossip

bite and sting, and through all and over all the intolerable heat, made up for us children a strange, enchanted page of the past family history.

The planters welcomed strangers with ardent kindness. They served God with the same fervor. Dancing and card-playing were regarded as devices of the devil, the southern "church member" being then, as now, much more strict in abjuring these carnal delights than is the descendant of the Puritan.

While we were in this neighborhood Major Delasco's wife gave a small supper, after which there was a carpet dance. On the following Sunday there was a celebration of the Holy Communion in the Presbyterian church of which she was a member. When she went, according to custom, for a silver token admitting her to the table it was refused. Early on Monday morning the Major sent a challenge to each of the elders and members of the session, eighteen in all. Most of the men whom he had challenged were his cronies, with whom he supped daily, and exchanged

In the Far South

gossip, receipts for drinks, or the eggs of fancy poultry.

“I may die on the field,” he said, “but I shall have vindicated Maria’s honor, thank God!”

This washing of reputations clean by blood was going on perpetually.

On the day when my father first arrived at the village he was passing down the street when he observed that a gentleman was following him rapidly. He halted, coming abreast of him, and, drawing a pistol, pointed it at his head. Naturally my father started back.

“Thank you, sir,” said the stranger courteously. “It is the gentleman on the other side of the street I wish to shoot.”

He pulled the trigger, and the gentleman on the other side fell dead, with the bullet in his heart. During the next six months more than thirty men were shot on the same grassy highway. Every one of these deaths was the outcome of the creed which rated honor higher than life — a creed which scarcely has a place among the motives of any man nowa-

Bits of Gossip

days. One fact will show how stringent it was then.

There was a family whom I shall call Impey, because that was not their name, and because they claimed kinship with Sir Elijah Impey, the judge in India famous as the murderer of Nuncomar. Some French blood of a finer strain than that of the English butcher had some time been mixed in the race.

One branch of the family ended in an old man of eighty, his daughter, a widow, his granddaughter, a delicate girl of sixteen, and her baby brother.

Many years after we had left the neighborhood, Judge Mabury, one of the planters, with his wife, visited us on their way home from the North. They had much to tell us of our old friends.

“And Mary Impey?” some one asked at last.

“Oh, little Mary?” exclaimed Mrs. Mabury. “She had a very tryin’ experience, poh child! But it all ended right. You know she lived alone with her grandfather and

In the Far South

little brother, quite remote. She heard one day that Colonel Dupree had spoken—well, coarsely of her. I can't go into details. The remark left a stain on her character. She heard it in the mohnin', an' she considered about it. She had no father. Willy was only seven; thah was nobody but her grandfather, an' he was imbecile. So she called foh her pony an' rode into the village, an' stopped at the tahvern, where the colonel was likely to be. Some gentlemen she knew were on the gallery.

“‘Is Colonel Dupree inside?’ she said, very scared to speak out before them all.

“So they called him, and then came around the horse to talk to Miss Mary.

“When he came out o' the doh, smilin' an' bowin', she said, ‘Colonel, I've been told you spoke of me yesterday in wohds that I can't repeat. Thah's no man to come an' ask about it. What grounds had you foh speaking of me so?’

“He could n't deny it in the face of the men standin' thah who had heard him, so he said:—

Bits of Gossip

“‘I was drunk when I did that. ‘Fore Almighty God, Miss Mary,’ he said solemnly, ‘thah’s no ground foh it. Thah’s no woman in the State more deservin’ of honor than you.’

“‘That is enough foh me,’ she said. ‘Now, foh you’— She put her hand in her pocket and took out a little pistol and shot him through the head. Then she rode back home again.”

“She killed him! Did n’t they arrest her?” we cried.

“Arrest her? Why, you don’t understand. Thah was nobody to do it but her. Of course she was sorry about it,” said my friend, stroking the fringe of her overskirt, “but it had to be done. She married soon after that. Oh, I forgot to tell you,” she pattered on, smiling. “Little Willy cried when he understood whah Mary had been.

“‘That was my business, sister,’ he said.

“Bless the child! of cohse, if he had been a little bigger— But they would probably have disarmed the boy, and not have given him fair play.”

In the Far South

And as she talked, my mind swung dizzily back to the old point of view. What, after all, was the Colonel's life, or any life, if honor was at stake?

"Poh Mary!" Aunt Dody was saying. "She's dead now. Died six years ago, just tired out. Her husband was a rampagious kind of creature, and so were her daughters. Mary was always a timid little body, and she spent her life tryin' to make the world easy for them."

"Did she ever regret what she had done?"

"Oh, no! Why, certainly not! I never heard her speak of Colonel Dupree but once. She said, 'I am sorry, Aunt Dody, it was I who had to do that. He made much mischief in the world. But perhaps he's doin' better now — elsewhere.' Perhaps he is," sighed Aunt Theodora, doubtfully shaking her head.

"Of course you remember," said the Judge, now joining in the discussion, "that there was a strained feeling between the Impeys and the Delascos?"

"A vendetta — yes. Is it still going on?"

"Well, we don't call it that. Vendetta's

Bits of Gossip

too big a name. The low-class whites in your Virginia hills here have vendettas, and are always in the papers. That was just a — difficulty between those families. They said little about it, but it has been going on since the opening of the country. That don't seem to have been any reason for it — no insult — nothing tangible. But the two families are different, and apparently they can't tolerate each other on the same earth. For fifty years not a Delasco died in his bed. Yes, they certainly ran it pretty hard then."

As he spoke, the forgotten story came back to me. Neither family had allowed the feud to absorb their lives. They were planters, lawyers, or speculators, many of them busy and useful men. But when one of their natural enemies came on their path they rid it of him as they would of any other noxious vermin. Their neighbors had always looked on with mild regret. It was a pity, they thought, that two such important and agreeable families felt it to be their duty to kill each other on sight. But nothing in their code could have been more underbred than interference.

In the Far South

“There are families,” the Judge said ponderously, “that die of consumption, and some are mowed down by scrofula. But it does n’t seem to be God’s law that an Impey or a Delasco should die of disease. They were meant to make an end of each other. And of course you can’t run against God’s law.”

“What became of Major Delasco?” we asked. “When we left Big Spring he had eighteen duels on hand.”

The Judge laughed. “Oh, he came through them without a scratch, and others — others. Gentlemen shot wide with the Major. He was a friendly old soul, pottering about, always bragging of his fancy poultry or his brew of apple toddy. One of the Texan Impeys made an end of him. Picked a quarrel on the road, and used his knife on the old man. I never asked the details. I could n’t hear them. The Major’s death was a great shock to me — a great shock.”

“And then, the Texas Impey?”

“Well, of course the Major’s sons set out at once after him. But Dan, their old coachman, met him on the street in Huntsville, and

Bits of Gossip

shot him on sight. He was the last of that branch, fortunately. A bad lot."

"Then the Impey family is extinct?"

"No. There's Willy, Mary's brother," growled the Judge, with a sniff. "I've nothing to say against Willy. He's a pleasant, affectionate lad. But somehow he'll never raise cotton."

I never knew the man whom I call Willy Impey, except through our mutual friends. He was for years a favorite leader of the German at Saratoga and the White Sulphur Springs, and was always a prominent figure at the Mardi Gras — a little, gay, fair man, as nervous and affectionate as a woman. He went reluctantly into the war, "not wanting to kill anybody, not even the Yankees," but once in he fought with a blind fury.

The end of the struggle left him ruined. He tried once or twice weakly to earn his living, but soon collapsed into the old routine of dancing and card-playing. He could n't, as the Judge expressed it, "raise cotton" — a more venial fault of character always in the South than in the North. His mother had a

In the Far South

small income, and he lived with her. But she never was satisfied with him. She was a woman of fine presence, and much fluency. She talked a good deal of "men who etched their names high on the roll of southern chivalry."

But Willy did not trouble himself with etching his name anywhere.

Mrs. Mabury, on one of her visits, years later, told us of his death.

"Willy," she said, "was just going seriously to work, when he was cut off. He was quite in earnest that time. Of cohse he had his jokes and songs as always — it would n't have been Willy if he had n't. As for drink — he did n't take to it regularly — no. But occasionally, of cohse —

"He owned a large track at Big Spring, and he decided to come back and grow cotton thah. He was n't goin' to do it in the old way, either. He looked into the new methods, and hired an expert as overseer, and spent what little he had in machinery and the like. Well, the overseer arrived and began work. Willy was to come next week. But, you see, in all these years the Delascos had seated

Bits of Gossip

themselves firmly at the Spring. They used the old methods, and the word got about that this Impey fellow meant to run them out with his modern improvements. The Judge heard the storm risin', and he wrote to Willy begging him not to come.

“‘Foh God’s sake,’ he said, ‘don’t open up the old grudge! Thah’ll be trouble!’ But Willy appeared on the day set, smilin’ an’ funnin’ away as usual.

“‘Pretty talk,’ he says, ‘that a man cahn’t fahm his own ground as he likes in this year of the nineteenth century, in a Christian community. Why, bless yoh soul, Aunt Dody, I’ve no grudge against the Delascos!’ he says.

“But the Delascos met in their houses an’ wohked each other up to a fury. It was n’t Willy’s fahm they were against, it was Willy. They are reasonable men — some of them. But it was the old hate comin’ up again in their blood. They could n’t help it, I suppose. Well ” — she glanced around, suddenly pale, “it was done, an’ I was thah.”

“You?”

“Yes. I heard what was planned early in

In the Far South

the mohnin'. The Judge had gone to the city, so I went myself to the tahvern whah Willy was — Ody Peay's, you know, only it 's another house, an' Ody 's dead. Willy was upstahs eatin' his breakfast. He laughed at me. I told him they said he should not leave the town alive. 'Dear Aunt Dody,' he said, 'they've been scaring you because you're a woman.'

"Then the landlord came in, out of breath. 'Mr. Impey,' he said, 'the Delascos are below in the hall — six of them. They sent word foh you to come down. Every man of 'em has his gun!' Willy stood up. He had no blood in his face. You know Willy never was a fighter.

"'I am not armed, Mr. Pomeroy,' he said. 'Do the gentlemen know that I am not armed?'

"'Yes. They don't keer. They bid me tell you thah was but one Impey livin', and the earth was tired of carrying him.'

"Pomeroy ran into a back room. 'Hyah, sir,' he says; 'thah 's a ladder down into the kitchen. I can hide you in the cellar. Come. Thah 's a chance!'

Bits of Gossip

“Willy ran to the ladder an’ then stopped. ‘Mother would n’t have me skulk like a rat in a hole,’ he said, standin’ thah.

“I was so wild, I ran out on the stairs. They were all below. ‘Men,’ I screamed, ‘are you goin’ to murder him in cold blood? Six against one! Are you devils?’ I don’t know what I said to them.

“Old John Delasco answered me. ‘Mistress Mabury,’ he said, ‘go back. Don’t meddle hyah. It’s the last of a bad breed goin’ to be wiped out!’

“An’ that man had eaten at my table an’ walked with me to church!

“I went back. Willy was standin’ thah. His thin little face was like that of a corpse. I begged him to go down the ladder. It would have been a sure escape. But he shook his head.

“‘Mother will be satisfied with this,’ he said. ‘I could n’t live like a man, but I can die like one;’ and he gave a queer smile. ‘Tell her, Aunt Dody,’ he said.

“Then he flung the door open and stopped at the head of the stairs.

In the Far South

“‘I am here, gentlemen,’ he said, drawing himself up, and he folded his arms and walked slowly down the steps.

“They let him come halfway, and then —

“The poor little man was lyin’, all blood, where he fell when I ran down. I lifted his head in my arms, but he only spoke once.

“‘Tell mother,’ he said.”

IV

THE SCOTCH-IRISHMAN

SITTING by the chimney corner as we grow old, the commonest things around us take on live meanings and hint at the difference between these driving times and the calm, slow moving days when we were young.

Now here beside me, for instance, is an old high clock—the kind whose one weight hangs on groaning chains—such as the first Swedish settlers brought with them on their barkentine, the Key of Calmar, the first vessel to sail up Delaware Bay yonder, then a silent and nameless flood of water.

It reminds me of just such a clock which stood in a farmhouse in Pennsylvania fifty years ago, and of a little circumstance concerning it which has a curious significance.

I was a visitor one fall in this house, a large stone homestead set on a low hill, with its barns and corn ricks and cider presses, hedged

The Scotch-Irishman

in by orchards and rolling wheat fields, while beyond stretched miles of forests of oak and sycamore. Nowhere in this country, from sea to sea, does nature comfort us with such assurance of plenty, such rich and tranquil beauty as in those unsung, unpainted hills of Pennsylvania.

The farmer's family belonged to what in England would be called the upper middle class, and in France the *haute bourgeoisie*. They were of Scotch-Irish blood. Their kinsfolk were the small lawyers, doctors, ministers, and farmers of country places; these men drove the plow, the women milked, cooked, and sewed. But there was a Knabe Grand in the parlor and fine damask in the linen closet and on a couple of shelves some books, — Scott, and the "Spectator," and Bunyan's Complete Works, cook books and Cæsar, and Black on the Horse. I don't believe you could find just that kind of people now in the whole country.

One cool September afternoon the clock mender came to the farm on his rounds. He drove a stout gray mare, in a little wagon with

Bits of Gossip

one seat and a box at the back, in which were his tools and a basket of provisions, for he made long journeys across the Alleghany Mountains, and there were few country inns in those days. Each farmer's wife when he was going away gave him a plentiful "piece" for two or three meals. He managed to visit each farmhouse once in a year, gathering the cream of the gossip from the Juniata to the Ohio.

We saw him coming up the long avenue of oaks and sycamores, waving his whip cheerfully. He had, too, a little horn, which he tooted to give notice of his arrival. The farmer was in the meadows a mile away, but his wife welcomed him, and bade him carry his carpet sack upstairs, for it was a matter of course that he would stay all night.

Then he went into the living-room and hurried, box in hand, to the high clock in the corner. His hostess ran after him with an anxious face.

"Yes, yes, I understand," he said, and stepping on a chair put his hand behind a gilt dragon on the top of the clock and brought

The Scotch-Irishman

out a black earthen teapot with a broken spout, and gave it to her.

"I know," he said, with a significant nod as she hurried away. "I doctor all the clocks in Pennsylvania west of the Alleghanies, and there is not one in a hundred which has not an old teapot on the top. It is the farmer's bank."

Later in the day my hostess beckoned me into her room, and lifting the lid of the old pot held it before me. It was full to the brim of coins, gold eagles, silver dollars, Spanish "levies" and "fips," even copper cents.

"This is our bank," she said, with a proud smile. "We started it the day after we were married. Penny by penny. All John could scrape up. My money for butter and for the calves. Jem never could have got through college but for this old pot, and all Molly's plenishing when she was married came out of it."

The broken teapot was significant of the business habits of the American of that day of the Middle States. He worked steadily, he had scarcely heard of speculation; if he be-

Bits of Gossip

came a "warm" man it was by dint of saving. The old teapot held countless comforts denied, countless innocent pleasures given up. His object in work or in saving was to educate his children—to push them on. He must add acre to acre to the farm for Joe; he must help Bill into the law—"Bill had a gift of the gab;" he must give Harry his schooling for the ministry. There was a feeling in his class, almost universal then, that one son in a family should be given to the work of the Lord.

I must interrupt myself to say just here that the character and manners of the Scotch-Irish settler in the Middle States were always very different from those of the Southerner and New Englander. It is worth while to mention the fact, because there is a vague popular belief that in the early times there were neither manners nor character in the country outside of New England and eastern Virginia.

The cause of this popular error is easy to understand. The Puritan and Cavalier both were keen-sighted, self-conscious men. Dur-

The Scotch-Irishman

ing the early years of the Colonies they made anxious interminable notes of their own feelings and doings. These notes afterwards furnished welcome material to American historians for comment, and the accumulation of both notes and comments is now so great, that we have come to think that American history in our first century concerned only the people of those two small sections.

We are often told that the American derives his intelligence from his New England ancestor and his courage from the Virginian. But has not the Scotch-Irishman contributed to the national character his shrewd common sense, his loyalty to his wife, his family, and his country? Narrow, homely qualities, perhaps. But they have their uses, after all.

Even to this day the Scotch-Irishman does not trouble himself to talk about his work, or to set forth his merits or those of his forefathers. He is an able, reticent, pig-headed, devout fellow, and cares little what the world thinks of him. His natural traits have been strengthened by circumstances.

So, also, with the New Englander. He

Bits of Gossip

landed on a stony, barren tract, and a large share of his strength during two centuries has gone to force a living out of it. Hence he has come to regard economy — a necessary unpleasant quality at best — as the chief of virtues. He has cultivated habits which verge on closeness in dealing with food, and with the expression of feeling, and even — his enemies think — with feeling itself.

Why did he not in the beginning push on away from the barren coast to the lands below — rich as the garden of the Lord? It was no doubt a very poetic, picturesque thing to land on Plymouth Rock; but surely it was a stupid thing to stay there.

The Scotch-Irish new-comer took possession of the fat hillsides and plains of Pennsylvania and West Virginia. He has had to spend but little of his force in earning a living. He brought with him as a rule some little capital, and with it took up large tracts and built cabins and forts.

His son settled himself more firmly on the land. He built — not the thin wooden cot-

The Scotch-Irishman

tages of the Northern States — but solid houses of brick or gray uncut stone.

Many of these old homesteads are still standing on the hills which slope from the heights of the Alleghanies down to the rich river-bottoms below. They are surrounded by huge barns, offices, and cider presses inclosed in great gardens and orchards. Beyond these stretch fields of waving corn and pasture lands. More than all the dwellings in the world, — from English castle to Swiss hut, — these old homesteads seem to me to express the protection and peace of home.

Their builders managed to bring into them many comforts and even luxuries from the old country. The woodwork in the one that I knew best was mahogany, imported from England when it had to be carried in a sailing vessel to the colonies and across the Alleghany Mountains in wagons. I must confess that the cleanly zeal of its owners put a coat of white paint at once on the rich wine-colored doors and mantels, and repeated it every spring.

The mistress had, too, her silver plate and

Bits of Gossip

delicate china, which was brought to her in the same way. The great establishment was self-supporting — pork, beef, and venison were salted down for winter use; pickles, vegetables, and preserves stored; there was a great dairy; a loom room where all the linen was woven; the kitchens swarmed with servants, bound apprentices, Redemptorists, and black bondsmen, for Pennsylvania as yet had not rid herself of slavery.

The mother of the family was expected not only to know how to weave, to cook, to spin, but to control this great household in a Christian spirit. Her daughters were sent to Philadelphia for “a year’s finishing.” They went and came across the mountains on horseback. They learned in this year to play a couple of tunes on the guitar, to embroider, to make lace and wax flowers, and they each brought home huge pictures done by them in filagree of “Washington’s Tomb guarded by Faith, Hope, and Charity.”

They belonged to the generation before mine. Their city training did not unfit them for the work of pickling, weaving, and cook-

The Scotch-Irishman

ing, or the control of their own households, when the time came for them to marry.

The habits of these folk, as I remember them when I was a child, were generous and hospitable. There was much rivalry between women in household matters. Certain receipts in pastry and pickles and medicine were handed down in families from generation to generation. There were few formal dinners, but cover for the accidental guest was always laid on the supper table. Everyday life then was merry and cordial, but it needed a wedding or a death to bring out the deeper current of friendly, tender feeling in these people. Death was then really an agreeable incident to look forward to, when one was sure to be lauded and mourned with such fervent zeal.

The belief in education as the chief good was as fervent and purblind as now. Every county had its small sectarian college: the boy, if he were poor, worked or taught in summer to push his way through.

But while the ordinary life of these people was thus wholesome and kindly, their religion,

Bits of Gossip

oddly enough, was a very different matter. The father of that day believed that his first duty toward his child was to save him from hell. The baby, no matter how sweet or fair, was held to be a vessel of wrath and a servant of the devil, unless he could be rescued.

To effect this rescue the father and mother prayed and labored unceasingly. The hill of Zion, up which they led the boy, was no path of roses. Above was an angry God; below was hell. They taught him to be honest, to be chaste and truthful in word and act, under penalty of the rod. The rawhide hung over the fireplace ready for instant use in most respectable families. The father who spared it on his son felt that he was giving him over to damnation. Often the blows cut into his own heart deeper than into the child's back, but he gave them with fiercer energy, believing that it was Satan who moved him to compassion.

As most pleasant things in life were then supposed to be temptations of the devil, they were forbidden to the young aspirant to Heaven. The theatre and the ballroom were

The Scotch-Irishman

denounced; cards, pretty dresses, and, in some sects, music and art, were purveyors of souls for the devil. To become a Christian meant to give up forever these carnal things.

Parents who were not members of any church also taught their children self-denial. Did a boy cut his finger, the first howl was silenced with: "Not a word! Close your mouth tight! A man never cries!" The same adjurations were given when the whip was being applied to his back.

A high-tempered child was held by many intelligent parents to be possessed with a kind of demon, which required strong measures for its expulsion.

"You must break his spirit and then he will obey you," was the universal rule. In my childhood I once heard a bishop, who I am sure was a kindly, godly man, say:—

"Whipping does not always conquer a child's spirit, but I never have known a dash of ice water on his spine to fail."

It was believed that, once conquered, the child would yield implicit obedience to his parents, and in that unreasoning, unquestion-

Bits of Gossip

ing obedience lay his one chance of safety. Had not God appointed them his guardians during the years when his brain and soul were immature?

Then there came to parents successive pauses of doubt, of inquiry. There were heard at first timorous suggestions of "moral suasion." Was the soul really reached by a rawhide on the back? Why not appeal to the higher nature of the child? Why not give up thrashing and lure him to virtue by his reason? The child who was old enough to sin was old enough to be redeemed. Why not then bring about the awful change of soul called conversion, in infancy?

This theory, urged in practice by pious, zealous people, caused, half a century ago, a sudden outbreak of infant piety. I do not speak irreverently. There is nothing on earth so near akin to God as one of his little ones. Our Lord, when he would set before his apostles an example for their lives, placed a child, pure, humble, and innocent, in their midst. But he did not send that child out to preach the Gospel.

The Scotch-Irishman

The children of fifty years ago, if they were nervous and imitative, soon caught the religious dialect of the hour. They lisped of regeneration and sanctification; every village boasted of its baby saint, usually an anæmic inheritor of consumption, whose diseased brain fed on his body. Tales of his super-human virtue and piety were carried by eager grandparents and aunts far and wide, and often crept into print. I remember especially one popular book, — a memoir of Louisa B., who was hopefully converted at three, and died, triumphant, praying for her unregenerate neighbors, at four years of age!

The Sunday-school libraries were flooded with fictitious tales of boy and girl evangelists, who invariably were weighted in life by drunken fathers, fashionable mothers, or infidel uncles. The conversion of these sinners by pious infants was the motive of most of the Sunday-school books of that day.

Boy preachers were another product of this phase of education. Lads of twelve or fourteen, driven by excitement into hysterical raptures, were carried from pulpit to pulpit

Bits of Gossip

to kindle revivals. Such boys usually continued in the public eye, voluble and zealous, for a few years, and then lapsed into obscurity, carrying with them an overweening vanity, a bitter sense of failure, and abnormally dull brains which yielded them nothing but headaches.

It seems incredible to the shrewd, practical, unimaginative American of to-day that his forefathers could ever have led their children to such spiritual intoxication.

But, after all, it was the methods, not the motives, of the man of that day that were at fault.

The Almighty, you must remember, was always present with him. He appealed to God when he lay down to sleep and when he arose, when he ate or when he fasted, when he wanted rain and when he had too much rain. If he should die suddenly it would be by the visitation of God; if he sent out a cargo he invoked God, on the bill of lading, to bring the good ship into a safe harbor. He held that this Supreme Power took a personal interest in his crops, his rheumatism,

The Scotch-Irishman

and his choice of a wife. He tried, naturally, to make his children the servants of this Omnipotent Ruler. Whether he set his boy in a pulpit or took him to the barn and whipped him like a dog, his motive was the same — to make him a Christian, and a faithful follower of God.

Crime, to the man of the forties, was an alien monstrous terror. He was not forced, as we are, by daily friction with crowds, by telegraphs, railways, and morning papers, to take it into his decent jog-trot life and grow familiar with it. He was not familiar with it. A murder became a traditional horror in a neighborhood for generations. The whole nation sat up shuddering night after night to hear the end of the Parkman-Webster trial. People then looked at an atheist or a divorcee as we would at the Gila monster.

Religious dogma was the chief food for the brain of that long-ago Quaker, or Presbyterian, or Baptist. He wrangled over predestination or immersion at the table, in the shop, as he got up, and as he went to bed. He was ready to give his life, as some of his fathers

Bits of Gossip

had done, for his special dogma. Unfortunately, he mistook dogmas for religion. He knew the Bible by heart, and quoted it incessantly. He did this even though he were not a church member. Every American then, though he might himself be a criminal, venerated religion. The minister was still a power in the land; he was the universal friend and advisor — the “sense-carrier” in the early settlements. “The cloth” was honored as the sign of a real authority, and the Bible was the most sacred visible thing on earth. Even the sinner acknowledged that it was the Word of God — that in it was written his own sentence, the law that gave him his place forever yonder in that unseen eternity. Every child in a respectable family learned verses from it by heart daily. The family where this was not done was considered below caste. Thus the child for half an hour each day was made familiar with the great truths of life in the noblest English ever written; a training surely as useful in the making of a man as the finger drills of the modern kindergarten which have replaced it.

The Scotch-Irishman

Education was different then, too. The daughter in a family of gentlefolk was usually trained in a quiet private school or at home. She learned enough arithmetic to keep her accounts, enough astronomy to point out the constellations, a little music and drawing, and French, history, and literature at discretion. In fact, the peculiar characteristic of that old training was that it all was at discretion. Ordinary girls learned enough to enable them to pass intelligently through the ordinary happenings of their lives. But if a girl had the capacity or desire for further development in any special direction, she easily obtained it.

Before the birth of the New Woman the country was not an intellectual desert, as she is apt to suppose. There were teachers of the highest grade, and libraries, and countless circles in our towns and villages of scholarly, leisurely folk, who loved books, and music, and Nature, and lived much apart with them. The mad craze for money, which clutches at our souls to-day as *la grippe* does at our bodies, was hardly known then. The

Bits of Gossip

American had time for other pursuits and passions.

Then, too, he had not begun to coöperate — to fuse himself into Guilds, and Unions, and Leagues. The individual developed slowly and fully. He followed his own chosen path. Now, the essential duty set before him is to keep step with some body of men, to be one of a majority — to sink himself in the mass.

There was space in that calm, leisurely life for the full growth of personality. Hence, if a boy or girl had a call to any kind of mental work, they followed it quietly and steadily. They studied Greek, or mathematics, or literature, because Nature had fitted them for that especial study.

But I am forgetting my old friends with their little black teapot.

Twenty years later I went back to the old farm. The orchards, the yellow wheat fields, the great silent woods, were all swept away. In their stead a vast plain, treeless and grassless, stretched to the horizon. Here and there upon it huge derricks and pyramids of

The Scotch-Irishman

hogsheads of petroleum rose against the sky. The farmhouse was gone; in its stead were the shops and saloons of a busy drunken town.

My old friends had struck oil; their well was one of the largest in the State. Money poured in on them in streams, in floods. It ceased to mean to them education or comfort or the service of God. It was power, glory. They grew drunk with the thought of it. The old people hoarded it with sudden terror lest it should vanish. Their only son came to the East with his share, and his idiotic excesses made him the laughing stock of all New York. He was known as Coal-Oil Jimmy, and drove every day on Broadway in a four-in-hand with white horses and a band of music. He died, I believe, in an almshouse.

This was thirty years ago. You will search now in vain in that neighborhood for the old type of farm and farmer. There are no longer little dairies where the women beat their fragrant butter into shapes, stamp them with their initials, and send them proudly into

Bits of Gossip

market. The butter is made by men *en masse*, in huge creameries, and handled by wooden paddles. The farmers' daughters, if they are well-to-do, are traveling abroad; if they are not, the girls are stenographers or saleswomen in some city.

Nowhere will you find the old black teapot hidden, with its little pathetic hoardings. Nowhere, either, will you find the mad craze of sudden wealth. Coal-Oil Jimmy belonged to a generation that is dead.

We have grown used to money. The handling, the increase of it, is the chief business of life now with most of us. The farmer's wife no longer gives her mind to the small ambitions of sewing rag carpets or making jelly. Even she has her little investments. She keeps an eye on certain western gold mines, in which she has secretly "taken a flyer" now and then; she even buys on a margin through a broker, unsuspected by her husband or the boys.

The grandson of these Bible worshipers, still nominally a Christian, an educated young fellow familiar with the literature of half a

The Scotch-Irishman

dozen countries, probably never has read a chapter in the Bible and never will. Whether it is the Word of God or of some Jewish poets he really has never cared to inquire. The oddest point, indeed, of his position as to this question is his absolute indifference to it. He has a vague idea that the Book was lately overthrown by the Higher Criticism.

But as to what the criticism is, or what the Book, he has but vague ideas. They bore him, and in his hasty march through life he has learned the trick of promptly ridding his path of all things that bore him.

The literature of his work, whatever that may be, does not bore him—reports of stocks, or of new microbes, or of findings in court. These things he understands. But talk to him of foreordination or sanctification, or any of the doctrines for which his fathers fought and sometimes died, and he will listen to you civilly, but privately he will think you a crank or mad.

What have these abstractions, he says, to do with life? His work is his life. Work

Bits of Gossip

now puts a stress and strain on men of which our ancestors knew little. The American is in the thick of it. Whether he be President or newspaper reporter, he feels that he personally has the world by the throat, and that if he loose his hold for a minute the progress of the universe will come to a stop.

What time has he for abstractions, for looking into the Trinity or the Atonement, or hell itself? These are mysteries, he says frankly, which neither he nor any other man ever did or ever could understand.

Is this irreverent, busy fellow, then, less a servant of God than his lean, church-going, irascible ancestor?

Prosperity has softened him. He has become good-humored, cheerful, and kindly, much more ready to help his neighbor than was his grandfather. That faithful old soldier fought the devil, prayed and fasted, and argued, in order that he himself might escape from hell. That was his chief business in life—to save his own soul. He had little time to give to his neighbor.

The American business man now has his

The Scotch-Irishman

hands too full of work to attend to straightening out his relations with his Maker. He does work well. He has nourished the root of brotherly love, which Christ planted, into a marvelous flowering and fruitage. Asylums, free schools, missions to the heathen, sick kitchens in the slums, are his triumph and delight. Take any of our large cities. You may find the churches almost empty, but the hospitals will be full and well supported.

Leading business men hardly know the meaning of the dogmas for which their fathers fought to the death, but tell them of starving Russians or plague-stricken Hindus and their zeal flames out in white heat. Ships or trains cannot fly quickly enough around the world to carry their help and good-will.

It is true that our people now do not acknowledge Christ with the unquestioning veneration which their fathers felt. With a conceit quite unconscious of its own absurdity, each college boy and girl puts the Almighty and His Messenger to man on trial, and pronounces judgment on them.

Bits of Gossip

But, after all, we are a young nation, and vanity is a fault of youth. We will grow out of it presently.

In the mean time the spirit of Christianity becomes more dominant among us with every year. Never since Jesus was born in Bethlehem have his teachings of brotherly love so moved any people as they do these doubting Americans, here and to-day.

V

THE CIVIL WAR

I LIVED, during three years of the war, on the border of West Virginia. Sectional pride or feeling never was so distinct or strong there as in the New England or lower Southern States. We occupied the place of Hawthorne's unfortunate man who saw both sides. In every village opinions clashed. The elders of the family, as a rule, sided with the Government; the young folks with the South.

Throughout the whole country, however, there was a time when the great mass of the people took no part in the quarrel. They were stunned, appalled. I never have seen an adequate description anywhere of the amazement, the uncomprehending horror of the bulk of the American people which preceded the firing of that gun at Sumter. Politicians or far-sighted leaders on both sides

Bits of Gossip

knew what was coming. And it is they who have written histories of the war. But to the easy-going millions, busied with their farms or shops, the onrushing disaster was as inexplicable as an earthquake. Their protest arose from sea to sea like the clamor of a gigantic hive of frightened bees.

Each man, however, after the American habit, soon grappled with the difficulty and discovered a cure for it. He urged his remedy incessantly—in church councils, in town meetings, at the street corners. The local newspapers were filled with these schemes for bringing calm and content again into the country.

One venerable neighbor of ours, I remember, insisted that, to warm the chilled loyalty of the nation, the Declaration should be read in every house, night and morning, at family prayers. Another, with the same intent, proposed that every boy in the public schools should at once commit the Constitution to memory. It was urged that women should sing the "Star-Spangled Banner" in season and out of season.

The Civil War

In several towns bands of young girls marched through the streets singing it in a kind of holy zeal, believing, poor children, as they were told, that they would soon "bring again peace unto Israel."

These efforts to keep off the approaching disaster were urged in both southern and northern towns. The superstitious fervor of the people was aroused. Devout old men who, with tears and wrestlings of soul for their country, prayed themselves to sleep at night, naturally had revelations before morning of some remedy for her mortal illness. Women, everywhere, neglected their sewing, housekeeping, and even their love affairs, to consult and bemoan together. They were usually less devout and more radical in their methods of cure than the men; demanding that somebody should at once be hanged or locked up for life. Whether the victim should be Buchanan, Lincoln, or Jefferson Davis depended upon the quarter of the Union in which the women happened to live.

Their loyalty, like that of their husbands,

Bits of Gossip

depended almost wholly on their geographical point of view.

Naturally, these hosts of terrified, sincere folk carried their remedies to the place where they would be of use. Their letters and petitions flooded Congress and the White House for a year.

As the skies darkened, the country was astir with alarmed folk hurrying to their own sections like frightened homing birds. The South had been filled with traders and teachers from the North; northern colleges and summering places depended largely on southern custom. There had always been much intermarriage in the well-to-do classes of the two sections.

These ties were torn apart now with fierce haste in the alarm which followed Lincoln's election. By the time that he started to Washington to be inaugurated, the tension of feeling throughout the country had reached its limit.

The great mass of the people as yet took little interest in any of the questions involved except the vital one — whether the

The Civil War

Union should be preserved. The Union, to the average American of that day, was as essential a foundation of life as was his Bible or his God.

When Mr. Lincoln began his journey every eye was fixed on him in an agony of anxiety. How would he meet the crisis? Could he cope with it? It is only one of the facts of history that his cheerful, jocular bearing on the journey convinced the mass of people that he did not even know that there was a crisis. The stories he told to the waiting crowds at every station were funny, but nobody laughed at them.

The nation grew sick at heart.

The truth probably is, that while the soul of the man faced the great work before him, he hid his real thoughts from prying eyes behind his ordinary habits of speech.

A little incident that I know to be true always seemed to me to throw a light on Lincoln's character.

There was a young girl in Springfield of whom he and his family were very fond. Mr. Lincoln was in the habit of saying, "Mary

Bits of Gossip

must marry P——," naming a friend of his own living in another State. He contrived to bring P—— to Springfield and brought them together, with the result that they fell in love with each other. P——, however, was hopelessly shy, and Mr. Lincoln's prodings and urgings only alarmed and daunted him.

Two or three days before their departure for Washington Mrs. Lincoln asked the scared young people to supper, and their host, feeling that time was short, seemed to forget the nation and its woes in vainly trying to bring them together. The evening was over. Mary rose to go. She lived on the other side of the street.

"P—— will see you home," said Mr. Lincoln, going to the door with them in the hearty western fashion. A heavy storm was raging; they reached the pavement to find a flood of water pouring down the gutter, and stopped dismayed.

"Carry her, P——," shouted Lincoln. "Drop that umbrella. Pick her up and carry her! Wade in, man!"

The Civil War

The next morning when Mary came, blushing and happy, to tell him that she was engaged before she reached the other side of the street, he nodded, laughing.

“I knew that would do the work,” he said.

It was not, perhaps, a method used by the Vere de Veres, but it was very human — and it did the work.

That probably is the key to many other strange actions in Lincoln's life. When work was to be done, he tried the first method that came to hand without any critical nice delays.

The volunteers in both armies were, as a rule, a God-fearing, church-going body of men. I doubt whether an American army to-day would pay as much outward deference to religion. Stonewall Jackson was not the only commander who prayed at the head of his troops before going into action. North and South were equally confident that God was on their side, and appealed incessantly to him.

The town in which I lived at the beginning of the war was taken at once under the

Bits of Gossip

control of the Government and made the headquarters of the Mountain Department, first under Rosecrans and then under Frémont. Rosecrans impressed the townspeople as a plain man of business, but Frémont was the ideal soldier, — simple, high-bred, courteous; always at a white heat of purpose. His wife was constantly beside him, urging the cause with all the wonderful magnetism which then made her the most famous of American women.

The histories which we have of the great tragedy give no idea of the general wretchedness, the squalid misery, which entered into every individual life in the region given up to the war. Where the armies camped the destruction was absolute.

Even on the border, your farm was a waste, all your horses or cows were seized by one army or the other, or your shop or manufactory was closed, your trade ruined. You had no money; you drank coffee made of roasted parsnips for breakfast, and ate only potatoes for dinner. Your nearest kinsfolk and friends passed you on the street silent and scowling;

The Civil War

if you said what you thought you were liable to be dragged to the county jail and left there for months. The subject of the war was never broached in your home, where opinions differed ; but, one morning, the boys were missing. No one said a word, but one gray head was bent, and the happy light died out of the old eyes and never came to them again. Below all the squalor and discomfort was the agony of suspense or the certainty of death. But the parsnip coffee and the empty purse certainly did give a sting to the great overwhelming misery, like gnats tormenting a wounded man.

Absurd things happened sometimes, however, and gave us the relief of a laugh. Two of my girl friends, for instance, had a queer experience. They lived on a plantation near Winchester. The men of the family were in the southern army when that town was first taken by the Federal troops. Word was sent to their mother that two Union officers would that evening be quartered on her. The girls, in a panic, with the help of an old house servant, put all their table silver

Bits of Gossip

and jewels into boxes which they buried in the barnyard. The supper table was laid with coarse yellow linen, delft, and two-pronged iron forks, brought from the kitchen.

“The Yankee thieves,” they boasted, “should find nothing to steal.”

What was their dismay, when supper was served and the guests appeared, to meet two men with whom they had danced and flirted the summer away at Saratoga!

“What could we do?” tearfully they said afterward; “the silver was buried deep in the barnyard. We could not tell them we had hid it, expecting them to pocket the spoons. For two weeks they were with us, and went away, no doubt, to say that all the old families of the South ate on kitchen-ware with iron forks.”

There was, too, many a laugh in the preparation of troops for action. Regiments of men who never had fired a gun were commanded by men who never had handled a sword. Farmers, clerks, dentists, and shopkeepers to-day—presto! to-morrow, soldiers! Many a new-made officer sat up half the night

The Civil War

to learn the orders he must give in the morning. One gallant old officer told me, "When I went out to drill my men I always had the orders written on my shirt-cuff." Being near-sighted, he actually, at Culpepper, led the wrong regiment in a charge, leaving his own men standing idle.

The newly-made surgeon of a newly-made regiment came to bid us good-by before going to the field. "Yes," he said exultantly, "we're off to the front to-morrow. My men are ready. I've vaccinated all of them, and given every man a box of liver pills."

Yet with all this fever of preparation we never quite believed that there was war until, one day, a rough wooden box was sent down from the mountains. A young officer had been killed by a sharpshooter, and his body was forwarded that it might be cared for and sent to his friends. He was a very handsome boy, and the men in the town went to look at him and at the little purple spot on his white breast, and came away dull and sick at heart. They did not ask whether he had been loyal or a rebel.

Bits of Gossip

“ He was so young ! He might have done so much ! ” they said. “ But this is war — war ! ”

I remember that in that same year I crossed the Pennsylvania mountains coming to Philadelphia. It was a dull, sunless day. The train halted at a little way station among the hills. Nobody was in sight but a poor, thin country girl, in a faded calico gown and sun-bonnet. She stood alone on the platform, waiting. A child was playing beside her.

When we stopped the men took out from the freight car a rough, unplanned pine box and laid it down, baring their heads for a minute. Then the train steamed away. She sat down on the ground and put her arms around the box and leaned her head on it. The child went on playing. So we left her. I never have seen so dramatic or significant a figure.

When we hear of thousands of men killed in battle it means nothing to us. We forget it in an hour. It is these little things that come home to us. When we remember them we say : —

“ *That* is war ! ”

The Civil War

One of the most dramatic pictures of the war which remains in my memory is the departure of a company of Maryland boys to join General Lee. They left secretly and at night, as the Federal troops were in possession of all the passes in the neighborhood. But they met in the evening at the home of their captain, to receive, before they went, their colors from his mother's hand. He was nothing but a boy — they all were boys, in fact. And "he was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow."

It was a moonlight night, and the young men gathered on the lawn under the trees. When she came out on the high steps of the veranda she carried a tattered old flag. Her son came up and stood before her.

"Your grandfather fought under it at Valley Forge," she said; "he, too, went to meet the invader, and" — She had a little speech all ready to make, but she broke down here, thrust the old flag into his hand, crying, "Oh, Tom, you'll never come back to me." And he knelt, kissing her hands and crying over them, and the boys drew out their brand-new swords

Bits of Gossip

and waved them about. But not one of them could cheer.

A month later I stood on the porch of a country house on Staten Island with Robert Shaw's mother, another most true and womanly woman, who had sent out her boy at the head of a negro troop. She showed me his watch, shattered by a bullet, that he had sent to her, after a battle.

"It saved his life," she said; "I think he will come back to me. But if he never comes back" — and her face glowed and her eyes shone.

A few weeks later he lay dead, buried beneath his black soldiers.

These are two true pictures. I know they are the only kind which this generation wishes to see of the Civil War. Novels and magazines are filled nowadays with stories of gallant boys and noble old men from every free and every slave State dying for the cause they loved. We all like to think that that great national convulsion was caused by an outbreak of pure patriotism, of chivalry, of self-sacrifice in both South and North.

The Civil War

Measurably that is true. But there were phases of the long struggle familiar enough to us then which never have been painted for posterity. There were, for instance, regiments on both sides which had been wholly recruited from the jails and penitentiaries.

This class of the soldiery raged like wild beasts through the mountains of the border States. They burned, they murdered men, women, and children, they cut out the tongues of old men who would not answer their questions.

Again, it must be remembered that a large number of men in both armies did not, as we imagine now, volunteer in a glow of patriotic zeal for an idea — to save either the Union or the Confederacy — to free the negro or to defend state's rights. They were not all fervid, chivalric Robert Shaws or Robert Lees. They went into the army simply to earn a living. This was especially true in the border States during the later years of the war. Every industry, except those necessary for the maintenance of the army, had then come to a full stop. The war was the sole business of the

Bits of Gossip

nation. With many laboring men the only choice was to enlist or starve.

A large proportion of recruits, too, during these later years were drafted, and served only because they could not afford to pay for a substitute. So unwilling then were the men outside of the army to go into it that if a citizen were drafted he was obliged to pay from \$400 to \$2000 bounty for a man to be shot at in his place. Substitutes were cheaper in 1864, because then every incoming steamer brought swarms of Germans, Huns, and Irish to profit by this new industry.

We don't often look into these unpleasant details of our great struggle. We all prefer to think that every man who wore the blue or gray was a Philip Sidney at heart.

These are sordid facts that I have dragged up. But—they are facts. And because we have hidden them our young people have come to look upon war as a kind of beneficent deity, which not only adds to the national honor but uplifts a nation and develops patriotism and courage.

That is all true. But it is only fair, too, to

The Civil War

let them know that the garments of the deity are filthy and that some of her influences debase and befoul a people.]

There was one curious fact which I do not remember ever to have seen noticed in histories of the war, and that was its effect upon the nation as individuals. Men and women thought and did noble and mean things that would have been impossible to them before or after. A man cannot drink old Bourbon long and remain in his normal condition. We did not drink Bourbon, but blood. No matter how gentle or womanly we might be, we read, we talked, we thought perforce of nothing but slaughter. So many hundreds dead here, so many thousands there, were our last thoughts at night and the first in the morning. The effect was very like that produced upon a household in which there has been a long illness. There was great religious exaltation and much peevish ill temper. Under the long, nervous strain the softest women became fierce partisans, deaf to arguments or pleas for mercy.

Bits of Gossip

Nothing would convince some of the most intellectual women in New England that their southern sisters were not all Hecates, habitually employed in flogging their slaves; while Virginia girls believed that the wives of the men who invaded their homes were all remorseless, bloodthirsty harpies.

We no longer gave our old values to the conditions of life. Our former ideas of right and wrong were shaken to the base. The ten commandments, we began to suspect, were too old-fashioned to suit this present emergency.

I knew, for instance, of a company made up of the sons and grandsons of old Scotch Covenanters. They were educated, gallant young fellows. They fought bravely, and in the field or in hospital were kind and humane to their foes. But they came home, when disbanded, with their pockets full of spoons and jewelry which they had found in farm-houses looted and burned on Sherman's march to the sea; and they gayly gave them around to their sweethearts as souvenirs of the war.

The Civil War

The poet, Colonel Paul Hayne, told me that after the war was over he had a letter from a man in New York stating that he had several pieces of the Hayne old family plate and would like to know the meaning of the crest and motto.

“To the victors belong the spoils,” was the excuse for all these things.

On the other hand, the natural high tension of feeling in the whole nation during those years made noble, heroic deeds easy. Both armies were quick to recognize individual acts of courage in their foes and to be proud of them because they were done by Americans.

I remember that an old Confederate soldier once told me of the death of Theodore Winthrop, a gallant northern officer, famous before the war began as the author of two remarkable novels.

“Winthrop’s regiment,” he said, “was driven back. But he would not be driven back. He rushed forward alone to the top of the hill, sprang upon a fallen tree, and waved his sword, shouting to his men to

Bits of Gossip

follow. They did not follow. A dozen bullets pierced his breast. He swung to and fro, still shouting. I never saw a more heroic figure. When he fell a groan burst from the Confederate ranks. It was the death of a great soldier." And the tears stood in his old eyes, though many years had passed since he saw the boy die.

It may be that the glow of love for their country which on both sides then warmed men's hearts made kindly and noble deeds easier to them. But they were common enough through all the long brutality of slaughter.

There was one regiment, for instance, which, after a battle in the West Virginia mountains, near Romney, came up to a burned farmhouse; the owner, a young countryman in a gray uniform, lay dead in the barnyard. His wife crouched beside him, his head in her arms. They found that she, too, was dead, shot through the breast. Near by sat a boy baby, two years old, who looked into their faces and laughed. This reads like a cheap story from the Sunday

The Civil War

papers, but it is a fact. The men took the child with them and cared for it on their march. The only food they had fit to give it was hard-tack, soaked in milk, and it throve and grew fat on the queer diet under the care of its many foster fathers. A year later they brought the boy to Pittsburg and put him into an orphan asylum. He had no name but Hard-Tack, but he was rich in friends.

The hospitals, the care of the sick and wounded, kindled innumerable fires of sympathy and friendship in the midst of the universal enmity.

During those years of fierce struggle some little incident hourly showed how knit together at heart were the "two huge armed mobs," as Von Moltke called them, that were busy in slaughtering each other.

I remember a little story told me by Colonel Thomas Biddle, which will show you what I mean.

The colonel, then a young man on the staff of one of the Federal generals, — which, I have forgotten, — was ordered one day to

Bits of Gossip

reconnoitre the country lying around the camp, which was near Culpepper. He rode far into the hills until late in the afternoon, and, being hungry, stopped at a lonely farmhouse, tied his horse to the fence, and went in.

A raw-boned woman welcomed him.

"You're for the Union, eh?" she said. "So are we. Lookin' up the Secesh troops, I reckon. No, there's none of them about hyah. Teddy, see to the gentleman's horse."

A red-headed boy grinned and disappeared.

"Had no dinner? I ken give yo nothin' but bread an' buttermilk. But it's fine buttermilk."

"If I have a weakness for anything it's for buttermilk," the colonel said, in telling the story. "And this was fresh, the butter floating in yellow flakes on top, a drink for the gods. I sat and ate and sipped it slowly, and she watched me with her beady black eyes.

"'Now, whahabouts in the North do you come from?' she said.

"'Philadelphia.'

The Civil War

“‘Oh!’ Her face changed suddenly. ‘Thah’s a hospital thah; on Cherry Street. I reckon you don’t know nothin’ about it?’ She leaned over the table, her face keen and eager.

“‘Of course I know it,’ I said. ‘I used to go there often. It cheers the boys up for somebody to look in on them.’

“Her eyes glittered with excitement. ‘Thah’s other boys than Yankees thah. Secesh; them as is wounded. My son’s thah; he lost one leg.’

“‘What’s your son’s name?’

“‘Name of Briscoe.’

“‘Jem Briscoe? A long-jawed, lean fellow, with red hair?’

“‘Thet’s Jem,’ she leaned, panting, over the table. ‘Foh God’s sake! You seen Jem?’

“‘Yes,’ I said, ‘and liked him. I used to bring him tobacco sometimes and such trifles’—

“She sprang at me and fairly dragged me to my feet.

“‘You knew Jem? You’ve been good to

Bits of Gossip

him! An' I've brought the men on you! Go! Foh God's sake! They'll shoot you for a spy — go! Thah they are!'

"I looked out of the window. A dozen mounted men were galloping up through the gorge.

"I rushed out of the house, threw myself on my horse, and dashed down the glen. I heard her yell: —

"'I did n't know! Oh, make haste! Foh God's sake!'

"I drew my pistols from the holster, but they were dripping wet. Teddy had seen to that before he warned the rebels, whose camp was just behind the hill.

"Well, it was a hard race, but I won it. They fired a dozen bullets after me. I had good luck and reached the camp. It's queer, but from that day to this I can't taste butter-milk without a sick qualm at the stomach."

This story, too, sounds like a bit out of a novel. But I give it exactly as the colonel told it to me.

There was another curious incident which I know to be true in every detail.

The Civil War

A young man named Carroll enlisted in a Michigan regiment which, the next day, was ordered to Virginia. He had no kinsfolk but a sister, a young girl, who was neither mad nor an idiot, but was what the kindly Irish call "innocent." They believe that such half-witted, harmless folk are under the especial guardianship of God.

When Ellen was told that her brother had gone to the war, she followed him as a matter of course.

"Why, Joe could n't get along in those strange countries without me," she said. "Who would cook for him, or take care of him?"

She had but a few dollars, and soon lost them in the cars. She carried nothing with her but a little bag filled with Joe's neckties and bits of finery which she thought he would need.

"I will see him to-morrow, and he will buy me clothes and all I want there," she said.

This pretty, innocent girl traveled in safety thousands of miles, alone and penniless, and when she reached the Virginia mountains,

Bits of Gossip

wandered on foot from camp to camp, searching for her brother, always safe and unharmed.

In the universal hurly-burly and overturn of order in the country, all kinds of eccentric folk rushed into notice to fill the public eye for the moment and then to disappear. Every day brought a new preacher who had gone up to heavenly places the night before, and who could give us the exact opinion of Washington or Moses or St. Paul upon the war and its probable ending.

Men and women whose eccentric ideas had been smothered hitherto, now blazoned them forth unchecked; or, if they had a gift for leadership or organization or for making money, the field, the spectators, and the reward all now were ready for them.

I knew one lad of sixteen who had saved, dime by dime, a couple of hundred dollars. When father and brothers were rushing, guns in hand, to the battlefield, he sat down to calculate how he could invest his money profitably.

“What is there in the South that will be

The Civil War

kept out of the northern market by the war?" he questioned.

Turpentine! The idea was an inspiration.

He hurried out, spent every penny in turpentine, stored it for four years, and with the profits laid the foundation of a huge fortune.

A townsman of the turpentine lad had not his idea of glory. He was the scampish fellow of the town. No family nor church ever fathered or trained him. He made up his mind to take part in the war, single-handed. He had a good horse and got a commission as colonel from the Confederacy, donned the gray uniform, and rode through the Virginia border, leaving a trail of terror behind him. At last, in Moundsville, on the Ohio, he met a little Federal captain who had brought down \$20,000 to pay the troops of the Mountain Department, and was talking about it too loudly. Jem held up the little man, took his money, turned it into the southern treasury, and, worst of all, sent the poor boy home on parole, to fight no more for his country.

Another singular feature of the war, which

Bits of Gossip

I think nobody has described, was the hopeless confusion which followed its close. When Johnny came marching home again he was a very disorganized member of society, and hard to deal with. You cannot take a man away from his work in life, whether that be selling sugar, practicing law, or making shoes, and set him to march and fight for five years, without turning his ideas and himself topsyturvy.

The older men fell back into the grooves more readily than the lads, who had been fighting, when, in ordinary times, they would have been plodding through Cicero or algebra. Some of them harked back to college to gather up the knowledge they had missed; some of them took up awkwardly the tools of their trades, and some of them took to drink and made an end of it. The social complications of the readjustment were endless and droll.

I remember that a friend of mine, a venerable, gray-haired college professor, when hearing a class of freshmen at the beginning of the term in 1866, was struck by the peculiar

The Civil War

hoarse voice of a boy from the South. When the class was over, he said to him, "I beg your pardon, but do you know Cato's Soliloquy?"

"Yes, sah," the lad said, blushing. "It is my favorite recitation."

"Do you remember that two years ago you were detailed to guard a sheep-pen in a Texan camp in which were some Yankee prisoners? It was a moonlight night, and as you marched up and down you thundered out:—

'Plato, thou reasonest well,
Else why this pleasing doubt'—

"I've no doubt I did," said the Texan. "But how — Where were you, sah?"

"Oh," said the old doctor, "*I* was in the pen."

The effervescence simmered down at last. Men standing up as targets to be shot at were all of one height, but in peace each gradually found his level again.

The abolition of slavery is the only result of this great war which we recognize. But there were other consequences almost as momentous.

Bits of Gossip

The first huge fortunes in this country were made by army contractors in the North during the war.

The birth of the millionaire among us, and the disease of money-getting with which he has infected the nation, is not usually reckoned among the results of the great struggle. But it was a result, and is quite as important a factor in our history as is the liberation of the negro.

Another more wholesome effect of the long quarrel was oddly enough that it made of us a homogeneous people, which we never had been before. The Pennsylvania Dutchman and the Californian learned to know each other as they sat over the camp-fire at night, and when the war was over they knew the Southerner better and liked him more than they had done before they set out to kill him.

Another good result was, that while the five years of idle camp life and slaughter made a sot of many a coarse-grained, stupid boy, and a pauper for life of the man willing to take alms from the country to whom he once gave

The Civil War

paid service, it uplifted the whole lives of such men as went into it with a noble purpose.

When it was over, the farmer, the salesman, the shoemaker, took up the dull burden of his workaday life again, and carries it still.

But he never forgets that for five years he, too, was Achilles — of the race of heroes. The fact that for one mile in his long journey he worked, not for money, but for a great idea, must be for him always a helpful and uplifting memory.

VI

THE SHIPWRECKED CREW

I MUST plead guilty to a liking for those disreputable folk, the half-starved, scampish adventurers who haunt the outer edge of the fields of literature and journalism; for these fields march together now and the fence between them is almost broken down.

Your real geniuses — the accredited rulers in these demesnes — are not always people with whom you can fellowship. You stare at them, or save their autographs, but you don't ask them home to dinner or to go a-fishing with you for a long July day. One reason is, that many of these important folk have been too long aware that the public eye is upon them, and their self-consciousness covers their real selves as would mask and domino. Who can blame them? How can any man be his real self or indulge in any lovable, foolish capers when he knows that a dozen reporters of the

The Shipwrecked Crew

Sunday papers are focusing their cameras upon him?

Another reason is that you yourself have illusions about these men of genius. They are not always on the tripod, and you resent it when you see them off of it. A poet has sung to you like the lark at heaven's gate, and when you meet him he is babbling of his cook and of a new sauce for crabs. Or you meet that famous novelist whose book was one of the successes of last century, and he talks to you by the hour of his own incomparable genius, and assures you gravely that he has put Scott and Thackeray to shame. Or you are asked to dine with the woman whose songs have reached dark places in your heart, which you thought were known only to you and to God, and she giggles in her talk, and uses perfume, and poses even while she eats, as a conscious Sappho.

Now, it hurts you to see these priests of Apollo thus stripped of their proper gleaming vestments and going about in such cheap clothes. Their every-day dullness or underbreeding makes you forget their inspired mo-

Bits of Gossip

ments, and you end by ungratefully denying the help which they actually have given to you.

It is a good rule never to see or talk to the man whose words have wrung your heart, or helped it, just as it is wise not to look down too closely at the luminous glow which sometimes shines on your path on a summer night, if you would not see the ugly worm below.

But the poor unknown scribbler outside of the gates of literature has no reputation to keep up. He need not pose. Nobody mistakes his old hat for a halo. You have no illusions about him; nothing that he can do will disappoint you. He can afford to be his own tricky, fascinating self.

Although there are scores of biographies and portraits of our American Immortals, the famous folk who publish books and draw royalties and write autographs for church fairs, nobody has sketched those uneasy, unsuccessful ghosts who haunt the gates and hedges of the scribbling world; always outside, yet always hoping to enter in. I must tell you of one or two of them whom I have known.

The Shipwrecked Crew

I remember a chubby schoolgirl of sixteen, who once brought to me the manuscripts of several philosophic essays which she wished to have published "*at once.*"

"What was your object in writing them?" I asked, to gain time.

"Partly," she said sententiously, "to make a large sum of money, and partly to improve the age."

Few of these queer folk, however, have both of these motives. They either mean to wring a living out of the public or they propose to reform it, with the fervor of the apostles and as firm a faith in their own genius as ever martyr had in his God.

One of this last class was a woman from the mountains of Georgia who called on me one winter's day years ago. She was lean and crippled, and talked with the broad negro inflections of the quarters.

But she had escaped from the mountains. She had reached a city. She was on her way to storm Olympus, and had put on her best gown for the adventure, a faded green silk decorated with bows of washed yellow ribbon.

Bits of Gossip

She pulled at them nervously as she looked at me with excited pale eyes, her jaws twitching.

“I am on my way to New York,” she began at once. “I mean to go into the profession of authorship there. I expected to be paid some money here in Philadelphia for a poem of mine which was printed in the ‘Church Lamp.’ But when I arrive here, I find the ‘Church Lamp’ has not been published for a year. It has gone out! No office, no editors, no ‘Lamp’! No money for me! And I have no money—none at all;” waving her empty hands and laughing. “I thought that perhaps authors had a guild—a beneficial society to help each other with loans?”—

I quickly assured her that I never had heard of such a league, and asked her how she proposed to carry on life in New York with no money at all. Why not go home?

“Home!” she said. “Turn back! Why! I am an authoress. You don’t understand,” she explained patiently, tapping the sides of a little satchel. “Poems!” she whispered, nodding with shining eyes.

The Shipwrecked Crew

I hinted that New York editors did not stand upon their doorsteps with money in their hands waiting for poems. But she smiled at my ignorance.

“You forget that I am not an ordinary authoress,” she said quietly. “I have been preparing for this for many years. I have great power. I have genius. Everybody in our county will tell you that. I have genius. I have several of my best poems here;” and again she touched the old satchel.

Well — remonstrance was useless. She went to New York, and no word or sign came back from her.

Years afterward I spent an evening with Mrs. Ann S. Stephens — the Scheherazade of her generation, and probably the kindest woman in it. We were talking of the queer folk who followed her craft. I told her of the Georgian poetess. Her face flushed, but she said nothing. But a friend who was dining with us exclaimed: “Why, that is Inez Black. She is living with Mrs. Stephens now! She was invited to luncheon one day a year ago and she never went away!”

Bits of Gossip

“Inez Black undoubtedly *is* a genius!” said Mrs. Stephens, her white curls shaking nervously.

“Inez Black undoubtedly is a humbug!” said her friend.

To this day I don't know which of them was right.

There was no such doubt with regard to Fräulein Crescenz Wittkampf, a fat, fair, pink-cheeked German who once descended upon us. She was one of those modern women who are ready to seize the occasion — to seize any occasion by the bridle, mount it and ride it to victory.

Some good nuns in a convent in Alsace near the hut where she was born had recognized this power in the child, and taught her other things than embroidery — among the rest, English. When she was in her twenties there was a World's Fair in Paris. She went to it as saleswoman of some work of the Sisters. While there she quickly made friends. One of them, an Englishwoman, offered her fair wages to go to India as nurse and companion to the daughter of an

The Shipwrecked Crew

English officer stationed in Bombay. The girl was a child of twelve. Crescenz rejoiced at her good luck and set sail with her charge. Not until they were two days out at sea did she discover that the child was subject to violent paroxysms of madness. However, when she reached Bombay she was mistress of the girl and of the situation. She remained in India long enough to concoct a book made up of her imaginary dealings with Catholics and Hindus. It was highly seasoned with horrors and indecencies, but it had a religious title and was a savage attack upon the followers of the Pope and of Buddha.

Crescenz reaped a good harvest from it. She was expert, too, in making friends with notable people, — statesmen, popular preachers, millionaires, and fashionable women. Something in her round, innocent face, her China-blue eyes and her childish gurgle went to the hearts of most women and all men. They almost always gave her presents, usually in money. When they did not give she would begin to chatter of another book which she was writing, "Glimpses of Life in

Bits of Gossip

the Great Republic," and the personal anecdotes with which she would season it. "A little dingy, some of them. But for the sake of art, one must use one's friends, eh?" They would laugh uneasily and call her "a flighty, inconsequent child; but not vicious? Surely, not vicious?" But they always gave her money, to be safe.

No doubt the little rose-tinted girl was at heart a blackmailer, rending her prey for her food, merciless as a wolf.

But there are drops of red blood under even the wolf's hide.

One of our good friends, years ago, was Dr. J. G. Holland, who, more than any other American writer, fed the young people of the States through his prose and verse with the distilled essence of common-sense. He had incessant disputes with me about almsgiving, I upholding the ancient lax methods of the good Samaritan, who, out of his own pocket, helped the man fallen by the wayside, not inquiring too closely as to his character. The Doctor maintained vehemently that all alms should be given through the agents of the

The Shipwrecked Crew

Organized Charity Boards, and then only after close examination, to those whom they found worthy. Hence I laughed a little one day when I received a letter from him inclosing a large cheque, and asking me to call on a Mrs. Lamb who had written to him from Philadelphia, a widow with four children, starving in a hovel, who had, she said, once sung with him in a choir in Springfield. "I don't remember her," he said, "but no doubt she tells the truth. Will you see her, and if you think it right give her this and let me know what more ought to be done for her?"

I found the house to which she directed him to be no hovel, but one of a row of high showy dwellings near Logan Square. The Quaker town of late years has filled up with these sham fashionable houses. A film of brownstone hid the brick front, wooden towers rose above the eaves, the tiny hall was chocked by a huge imitation bronze Hercules, with a cotton-lace shade on his back, holding a lamp. Just as I reached the house a smartly dressed nursemaid brought a baby-wagon down the steps. A chubby, blue-eyed

Bits of Gossip

child of three years looked out smiling from the fluffs of white chiffon and rose silk. An old, lean woman in a soiled print gown, with no collar, an untidy wisp of gray hair knotted up on her head, anxiously helped the nurse carry down the wagon, and watched the baby out of sight with an eager glow of delight on her face. Then she turned to me.

“A very pretty baby!” I said.

“Yes.” She had the sharp, furtive eyes of a rat watching its enemy. But they softened a little. “It’s mine,” she added.

“Yes. And you are Mrs. Lamb? I have a letter of yours which I have come to answer. To Doctor Holland.”

“Holland? Oh — yes. Come in.” She stared at me perplexed and whispered to herself as we went up the steps.

Afterward I understood her perplexity. She was a begging letter writer by profession and sent off dozens of appeals a day to prominent people whose names she found in the newspapers. Who was “Holland,” and which story had she told him?

She ushered me into a room in which a

The Shipwrecked Crew

fat, bloated young man was lolling on a sofa. "This is my husband," she said, "Mr. Augustus Lamb. He is a sculptor. You may have heard of him?"

Augustus threw down his torn novel and glanced uneasily at the breakfast tray beside him and the unmade bed in the next room. "Yes, ma'am, I'm a sculptor. But I'll turn my hands to any kind of honest work. Except," — slapping his thigh and glaring at me defiantly, — "except one. I'll never be a bartender. I'll starve. But I'll not tend bar."

"Yes, yes, Augustus!" said his wife. "Go out, now. This lady wants to see me alone."

"Certainly, Cora, if I'm not wanted" — and he put on his high hat and swaggered out.

I need not linger over the story which I learned then and afterward. Cora Lamb was probably the most successful beggar by letters in this country. She had carried on the trade for years. She had married this man — who was young enough to be her son — and supported him. They both were drunkards, swindlers, and thieves. But their love for their

Bits of Gossip

child was genuine. I think each of them meant to keep her (it was a little girl, Mary Regina) away from the other, that she might grow up innocent and pure.

It is needless to say that Dr. Holland's cheque was returned to him. But I was interested in the Lambs and kept a distant watch on them.

A month later Mrs. Lamb was arrested for swindling. The charge was not proven, but while she was in Moyamensing, Augustus took all the money she had and the child, and decamped. She followed him, found them in a hotel in Chicago, attacked and stabbed him and escaped with the baby. Then the Lambs became a valuable property of the reporters. Augustus brought suit for the child, and when the courts gave her to him, managed to elude his wife and placed the baby in an institution near New York.

The rest of the matter is too ghastly for me to linger to make a dramatic story out of it. The half-crazed woman raced over the country looking for her baby, and at the end of a year found her. She obtained admission into

The Shipwrecked Crew

the institution as a servant, and at last escaped with the little girl and took passage on a Sound boat for New London. There was a heavy fog that night, the boat collided with another and sank, and hundreds of lives were lost. My readers will no doubt remember the incident, for the country shuddered with horror at the accounts of it, and of the corpses which covered the waves when the sun rose. Among them was that of an old woman. She had tied a child upon her breast, so that it sat upon her dead body as upon a raft, and so was saved.

So that was the end of my poor swindler friend, Cora. Little Mary Regina, when they untied her, cried to go back to her mother, and sat down on the beach beside her again, patting and kissing her cold face. Her father claimed her and gave her again into the charge of the good sisters.

But in the ragged, attractive regiment of Disreputables that I have known, the most attractive, and the most ragged as to morals, was Evangeline Gasparé.

Compared with other women of her profes-

Bits of Gossip

sion, she was a Napoleon among militiamen, a Salvini among barn-stormers. She preyed upon organizations, not individuals, and so masterly were her tricks that even her victims paid her a grudging homage. When she operated in England, the "Times" and "Saturday Review" in leading articles anxiously warned the public against the Queen of Adventurers, as if she were a new pestilence which was creeping into the country.

And who was Evangeline Gasparé? Ah, who ever knew? The pastor of a wealthy church in New York believed her to be the Irish widow of an Italian prince, a devout little Protestant whose only hope was to rescue her boy from the hold of his uncle, who was a cardinal, and to fit him for the Presbyterian ministry. This church supplied her regularly with funds.

Mr. Moody believed her to be a zealous Methodist detailed by certain Dissenters in England to report his work in this country. She followed him around over the States, and for months in his great mass meetings a little woman in gray was conspicuous. Some

The Shipwrecked Crew

of my readers may remember her. She sat near Mr. Sankey and sang the old hymns with a voice pathetic as Scalchi's, and a rapt, lovely face — often with tears. The newspaper reporters in Philadelphia knew her as the regular correspondent of the "London News." They made a comrade of her, gave her tickets to the theatres, heaped Christmas gifts on the boy. She used to ask them to gay little suppers, and sang drinking songs to them as fervently as hymns; being quite in earnest in both.

But Madame Gasparé did not drink, and was as chaste as ice. The whole of the seven devils seldom enter into one woman. Evangeline led no man into vice. But she told each of these young fellows confidentially the name of the noble English family to which her husband had belonged, and the story of the suit now pending to establish her son's claim to title and estates, and stripped the credulous boys of every dollar that they could raise, to pay her lawyers.

The weakness of the little woman was that the credulity of her victims soon bored

Bits of Gossip

her. She yawned in their faces and threw up each successful scheme to try another.

In Washington, one winter, she held a salon which was frequented by the ultra friends of the negro in Congress. So fervent was her zeal for the Freedman that she delivered for his benefit a public eulogy on Charles Sumner, then just dead, and in the fresh glow of its great success advanced on Philadelphia to be adopted and caressed by the kindly Quaker Abolitionists of that city. This adventure paid more in honor than in money, and during the winter of 1875 poor Evangeline sometimes was hungry.

It was then that I first saw her. An old clergyman sent her to me, introducing her as "a pious woman who had done noble work for the Freedmen. In her temporary embarrassment, I probably could suggest some employment," etc., etc. I found a little woman waiting for me who, in the first instant, made a singular impression of good-breeding and candor. She wore a simple, perfectly made gray dress and hat.

"Doctor G—— has told you about me?"

The Shipwrecked Crew

she said, in a low voice. It was an unusual voice, with a pleading note in it that reached your heart, as if a hurt child or a cripple spoke. "I am in a temporary strait. And he suggests that I shall — knit men's socks!"

She looked at me, her dark blue eyes gleaming with fun. One's heart warmed at sight to the innocent face — the candid eyes, the trembling lips.

"Is n't he droll?" she said, holding out her hands. "Fancy *me* knitting men's socks!"

I saw Evangeline Gasparé many times after that, knowing what she was. But the honest, confiding eyes and sensitive mouth never lost their power over me, woman though I was.

In the straits that followed during that winter she robbed a certain Mr. Smith of a small sum of money, and was found out. But her eyes and voice had power enough over Smith's kind heart to induce him to withdraw the charge against her.

On the opening of the Centennial Exposition, in May, some of her friends in the Senate came up and took her with them to

Bits of Gossip

the little high platform on which stood the most distinguished guests. Now, poor Mr. Smith, as it happened, was among the crowd of nameless folk below who were driven back by the police from even the outer court. What was his rage on looking up to see Madame Gasparé, in an exquisite costume, standing aloft, beaming with smiles, beside the Emperor of Brazil and General Grant!

He lost all control of himself and shouted: "Send that thief down! She robbed me of twenty dollars!"

Evangeline's eyes did not blench, nor her quiet voice falter. But in a moment she disappeared and this country knew her no more.

Three years later the English papers contained an account of the death of Admiral —, aged seventy, who had bequeathed the whole of his personal property to his adopted daughter, Evangeline Gasparé, "the orphan child of Ralph Gasparé, an Irish captain who had lost his life in the American Civil War, a volunteer in the southern cause."

The heirs brought suit to break the will. They broke it; they searched out the little

The Shipwrecked Crew

woman's history, producing the dead husband, and the living son, whom she had comfortably hidden in a school in Switzerland.

Evangeline was tried for perjury. The rank of the contestants, the infatuation of the poor old admiral, and the singular beauty and charm of the prisoner, made of the case a *cause célèbre*. Twice during the trial Evangeline started up and made impassioned appeals to the judge. He was English and slow of apprehension and of tongue. Before she could be silenced, the innocent eyes and wonderful voice had done their work. She was found guilty, but sentenced to only two years' imprisonment. The English newspapers jeered at her for her stupidity in keeping her lubberly son almost within sight while she played her desperate game, and for her obstinate refusal to become the wife of the old admiral.

Three years later I saw in the report of a Southampton police court that Evangeline Gasparé had been arrested for stealing six shillings.

The night closed over her after that. I know nothing more.

Bits of Gossip

But I am sure, whatever may be the depths into which she has sunk, in this world or in any other, there is one clean chamber in her soul. She has been true to her boy and to her woman's honor.

More than that. Of all these tricky folk, and many other poor vagabonds whom I have seen shipwrecked and lost upon the shores of life, there was not one who did not have some honest fibre in his soul, — a high belief, a pure affection, — some rag of a white flag to hold up in God's sight as he went down.

VII

A PECULIAR PEOPLE

WHEN I was young, although I lived in a slave State, chance threw me from time to time in the way of some of the leading Abolitionists, the men and women who then were busied in sowing the seeds whose deadly outgrowth was the Civil War.

To make you understand them, we need not discuss the great issue which tore the country asunder. But I must remind you that they were for years a small band, a Peculiar People. The great majority of northerners, a large minority of southerners, including many slave-owners, recognized slavery as an evil, and hoped to free the country from it by gradual and legal methods. But these Radicals would not temporize nor wait. "Abolish the evil now; cut out the cancer now, at any cost," they cried.

It would be impossible for the young peo-

Bits of Gossip

ple of to-day to understand the fury of zeal which fired this little band, or the hate and horror with which they were regarded in the South. We have grown more tolerant nowadays, both as to beliefs and individuals, and, it may be, more indifferent to great issues. We suffer any man now openly to exploit his opinions ; whether he preach anarchy or monarchy, heathen gods or no God, his worst punishment is a shrug of contempt.

But in the fifties the Abolitionist crossed Mason and Dixon's line at the peril of his life. His errand was supposed to be either abduction or murder.

Now, however, the grandchildren of these hot-blooded, warring folk in both South and North are curious to know what the men were like on either side who fought the war.

It is a natural curiosity. Even the heroes of the old Greek legend whose hate was so strong that their souls went on fighting for four days after their bodies were dead, must surely, after a few years of leisurely rest in Hades, have felt a curiosity as to what kind of men their enemies really were, and have

A Peculiar People

suspected that they might have been good fellows, after all.

Some such late rueful doubt is stirring now in the hearts of the old foes, and warming them to a wholesome, friendly heat.

I certainly never found the mark of Cain on the foreheads of these reformers, which their fire-eating neighbors declared was there; nor did I see the "aureoled brows of warrior saints," which Lowell and Whittier sang. They were men and women, alike fired with one idea, — the freedom of the slave. They preached it, they prayed for it, in season and out of season. They would not eat sugar nor wear cotton. Some of them gave up God himself because he had tolerated slavery. They were generally regarded as madmen running about with a blazing torch to destroy their neighbors' homes. But their frenzy was usually recognized as an unselfish madness. They certainly gained nothing by carrying the torch. No man was ever more relentlessly denounced or ostracized than was the Abolitionist, even in the North.

To make a truthful picture of them, I must

Bits of Gossip

confess that, apart from this common uplifting motive, there was in every man and woman of the little sect a touch of eccentricity, no matter what their station or breeding. They were always, in popular opinion, "queer." It was the old story of Doctor Johnson's twenty cups of tea, of Shelley's paper boats, or Jean Paul's soiled jacket. The man who rebels against an established rule, from Absalom to Paderewski, feels that he must wear his hair down his back. The man who makes war upon the world's great ordinances always picks a quarrel with its harmless little habits, even decencies. When the Florentine noble dared want and death to bring the sacred fire from the Holy Sepulchre to the altar of his little church at home, he preached an immortal lesson to the world. But why need he have ridden with his face to the horse's tail, so that the common people called him "Pazzi" — fool?

Why, because these good folk wanted to free the slaves, should they refuse to cut their beards or to eat meat, or have run after new kinds of fantastic medicines or religions?

A Peculiar People

But so it is. Your chivalric reformer, your holy saint, almost invariably fights obstinately about some absurd trifle, which makes the purblind public call him Pazzi. You may safely take his thoughts as bread for your soul, but generally you will find him a nuisance at dinner or on a journey.

I remember, too, that when you were with the Abolitionists you were apt to be kindled at first by their great purpose, but after a while you were bored by it. They saw nothing else. Like Saint George, they thought that one dragon filled the world.

Their narrow fury angered you. "Is the Devil dead?" you said. "What of his old works? What of drunkenness and hate and lies? Let us talk of these, too." But they ignored them all.

However, I suppose that the party or sect which is to do any work in the world must breathe its own peculiar atmosphere, speak its own little patois, and see but one side of the question on which it fights.

My family lived on the border of Virginia. We were, so to speak, on the fence, and could

Bits of Gossip

see the great question from both sides. It was a most unpleasant position. When you crossed into Pennsylvania you had to defend your slave-holding friends against the Abolitionists, who dubbed them all Legrees and Neros; and when you came home you quarreled with your kindly neighbors for calling the Abolitionists "emissaries of hell." The man who sees both sides of the shield may be right, but he is most uncomfortable.

One of the familiar figures to my childish eyes during these yearly visits to Pennsylvania was F. Julius Le Moyne, the candidate for Vice-President in 1840 on the Abolition ticket with Birney. The two men offered themselves to certain defeat, in order to test the strength of their party. They polled only a few thousand votes.

Francis Le Moyne was a physician in Washington, Pennsylvania, then a sleepy village. He was as unlike the townspeople as if Neptune or Mars had put on trousers and coat and gone about the streets. They were Scotch-Irish, usually sandy in complexion, conventional, orthodox, holding to every opinion or

A Peculiar People

custom of their forefathers with an iron grip. He made his own creed and customs; he was dark, insurrectionary, and French. He was descended, I have been told, from an *émigré* family from Brittany. Some of the hunted folk of the *ancien régime* settled on the Ohio at Gallipolis and tried fruit raising there. The father of the reformer made his way up to this quiet hill town. He was a kind of fairy godfather to the village children, because he spoke another tongue than English and lived in a foreign-looking house in the midst of a great garden of plants and flowers unknown elsewhere. In his office, too, he was always surrounded by uncanny retorts and crucibles; and many birds flew about him that he had taught by some secret method to sing French airs.

His son was a large, swarthy man, with much force of personal magnetism. He had, as I remember, a singular compelling, intolerant eye, which once seen you never forgot; the eye of a man who, having chosen a cause to serve, would give it the last drop of his own blood and force other men to give theirs. The

Bits of Gossip

cause he served was that of human freedom. He drew many of his townspeople into the Abolition party. But I think that they never quite understood or appreciated him. He was always alien to them. He should have lived in a court, or a metropolis, some great arena in which to work. He had the power for any work. Doctor Le Moyne was probably the truest representative of the radical Abolitionist in this country. He never gave his adherence to any temporizing or experiment of expediency, whether made by Frémont, Sumner, or Lincoln. "Cut out the cancer, and cut it *now*, though the patient die," was his creed. After the slaves were freed he gave both his influence and money to the work of their education.

Then he took up another reform — cremation. The rotting bodies under ground fretted him as much as the living slaves had done. He urged the matter vehemently on the American people, and built the first crematory on this continent. Baron Palm, who, with Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, was one of the first teachers in this country of

A Peculiar People

Theosophy, was, I think, the first person to be cremated in it.

A year later I called at the doctor's office. The sunny old room, with its bottles and jars, familiar to me when I was a child, was unchanged. So was my old friend, and the curious charm of his courtesy and dignity.

"Joseph," he said presently, "hand me that box from the top shelf."

The boy brought it. It was a gilt box marked Cream Chocolates. Inside were some charred bones.

"Olcott," said the doctor, "scattered Baron Palm's ashes to the waves off Coney Island with Buddhist rites. But these are his bones. Put them back, Joe."

The doctor never threw lime-light effects on his great ideas.

Abolitionism never was a burning question in our part of Virginia. Nothing lay between any slave there and freedom but the Ohio River, which could be crossed in a skiff in a half hour. The green hills of Ohio on the other side, too, were peopled by Quakers, all agents for the Underground Railway to

Bits of Gossip

Canada. Hence the only slaves we had were those who were too comfortable and satisfied with us to run away. We knew "the institution" at its best, and usually listened to the furious attacks on it with indifferent contempt.

The most vehement Abolitionist that I ever saw, flamed into our horizon one July morning in 1862. No other words will convey the breathless heat of that man's zeal.

I must remind you that by that time the Border States were one vast armed camp. The few men here and there who had cried out for arbitration or peace were either dead, or dumb from fear. The whole country now was given over to blood and fury. During the first year of the war there had been a good deal of terrified but friendly scuttling to and fro across the border. Local politicians made journeys to "use their influence on the other side." Southern children were hurried home from northern schools; helpless women sought shelter with far-off kinsfolk.

But now the lines between the northern

A Peculiar People

and southern states were closed and ramparted from end to end by armed men. No passes could be obtained from either Government. The man who tried to steal across the line, no matter what his purpose, was either shot on sight or hanged as a spy.

You can imagine my dismay then, when, one sultry morning, I received a letter from an Abolition leader in Boston, saying:—

“My friend, M. d’A. of Paris, a man eminent in the scientific world of Europe, has come to this country to aid the slave in gaining his freedom. He is eager to reach the South and begin his God-appointed work. I have sent him direct to you, hoping that your brothers will use their influence with some of the southern leaders to enable him to travel safely through the seceded states. If this is not practicable, will you assist him to creep through the lines in disguise? No doubt, courtesy will be shown to a foreigner on both sides.”

Courtesy?

I remember that at that moment terrified cries rose on the street. Some pretty young

Bits of Gossip

girls had been arrested for strumming "Dixie" on their pianos and were being led to jail. For martial law had been declared in our quiet old town at the beginning of the war. The division of Virginia was planned there, and the little city promptly was made the capital of the new State. Nowhere in the country, probably, was the antagonism between its sections more bitter than in these counties of Virginia which the North thus wrested from the South — "for keeps." Federal troops were hurried into Wheeling. The stately old dwelling across the street from our house was now the headquarters of the Mountain Department, under General Rosecrans. Some of our friends who were secessionists were in an old theatre just in sight which had been turned into a jail. Others were in a prison camp on a pretty island in the river. The change in the drowsy town was like that made in those little vine-decked villages on the flanks of Vesuvius after the red-hot flood of lava had passed over them. Nothing but gloom and suspicion and death were real to us now. The range of moun-

A Peculiar People

tains just out of sight was alive with rebel guerillas, quite as little minded to peace and mercy as our guards.

And I was asked to send a foreign slave-stealer safely through them !

At that moment his card was brought up. I found in the drawing-room a large, bearded man, who, in one excited minute, in a torrent of broken English and breathless French, told me that he had come from his own country to the help of mine, that he "had thoroughly mastered the situation in the North, and now threw himself upon my compassion, trusting to my hands to open the gates of the South to him." He pulled out packages of commendatory letters from Horace Greeley, Sumner, and Lovejoy. It was in vain that my father, whom I called to my help, assured him that if one of these papers were found on him in the South he would be hanged to the nearest tree. He laughed complacently.

" Ah ! I have my plan ! " he cried excitedly. " Zere ees a little river near here — ze Kennywah. I go to its shores. I dress in ze costume

Bits of Gossip

of ze paysans. You will kindly have taught me zeir patois. I buy a bateau. I row. I sing ze chanson of 'Dixie' loudly. Zey welcome me to zeir houses."

Argument was useless. For two days M. d'A. fumed and planned. Then one of our friends — a rebel and slave-owner, by the way — took pity on him.

"I am going home to St. Louis, Monsieur," he said. "If you choose to come with me I think you can make your way into the South. The lines are not so tightly drawn in Missouri as here. But I will not answer for your safety when you pass them."

They started for St. Louis together. M. d'A. sent his letters back to Boston, assuring us loudly that he would "be silent and wary as a serpent!" He was promptly arrested the day he crossed the lines, and spent a year in southern prisons and camps, but at last was exchanged and sent to a military hospital in Washington. There Lord Lyons, who was appealed to, found him, worn out with want and disease and disappointment. He hurried home to France, and sent back grate-

A Peculiar People

ful souvenirs to every one who had aided him.

The incarnation of the chivalric and noble side of Abolitionism was John C. Frémont. It had, like every cause, more sides than one.

Frémont had the ardent blood of a Frenchman and a South Carolinian. He made of Freedom a religion. I don't know that he had any especial liking for the negro — very few Abolitionists, by the way, had that. But the slavery of the black man — of any man — was abhorrent to him. He fought for the freedom of the negro as he would have fought for the Holy Sepulchre, or for liberty with Kosciusko, or Kossuth, or Garibaldi.

He was so completely the Paladin, the ideal knight, in his figure, his face, and his manner, that you took a certain comfortable satisfaction in knowing that he was in the right niche in the world. One man, at least, had the work in hand for which he was born.

His party clung to him with a passionate loyalty.

“My creed is short,” I once heard Sydney Gay, the editor of the “Tribune,” say: “I be-

Bits of Gossip

lieve in Almighty God, His Son, and John C. Frémont."

He meant no irreverence. In that time, when Americans were dying daily for each other and for ideas, their words were apt to be few and hot with meaning.

Nature, to begin with, had fitted Frémont out physically as a hero. Sir Philip Sidney was demeaned, we are told, in the eyes of the vulgar, by his lean, big-jointed figure and pimpled skin; but the American Sidney had the carriage of a soldier and the face of a poet. At first sight of him, the boy who blacked his boots, or the woman who was his laundress, felt vaguely that he was unlike other men — a something bigger and finer, made for some great purpose.

But if they talked to him, his singular simplicity and courtesy usually soon convinced them of his inferiority to themselves. The average American demands a little pose and strut in his great man. His hero must crow and flap his wings before he will believe in him.

No man went into the Civil War with the

A Peculiar People

brilliant prestige of the great pathfinder. At the age when other young men are still studying a profession, he had explored, on behalf of the government, the unknown wildernesses beyond the Rocky Mountains, had discovered the Sierra Nevada, the great Salt Lake, and had conquered from Mexico the vast region of California and given it to the United States.

Later he had organized a great political party, and in the free states, by the popular vote (though not the electoral), had been elected president of the United States.

No leader on either side, at the beginning of the fight, had the fame, or the personal magnetism, of Frémont, nor the passionate adherence of so large a body of followers.

He never was accused of lack of courage or ability, yet before the war was over he had sunk into absolute obscurity.

Was ever luck so hard ?

The first emancipator of the slaves, he never received any honor or gratitude from the negro race ; a daring soldier and a major-general, he lived in poverty for twenty-five years without a pension ; the man who had

Bits of Gossip

given a vast realm richer than Golconda to his country, he died, not owning a single foot of ground to leave to his children.

No man surely has so short a memory as the American.

One of his staff, by the way, once told me of a little circumstance which throws light upon the character of the man, and which I have never seen in print.

General Frémont, on August 30, 1861, in St. Louis, wrote the proclamation declaring martial law in the State of Missouri, and read it to his staff at night. The clause in which the "slaves of all persons who shall take up arms against the United States are hereby declared free men," was preceded by several explanatory paragraphs giving reasons in justification for such grave action.

The document was discussed that evening, but not signed. In the morning the staff assembled again; Frémont came in and laid the proclamation on the table. The introductory apologetic Whereases were crossed out.

"The proclamation of emancipation," he

A Peculiar People

said quietly, "needs no apology. I will do this thing simply because it is right."

His action was, as we all know, annulled by Mr. Lincoln, and Frémont was soon relieved of his command.

On looking back, there is one trait so common to the men whom I have met who achieved distinction that I am almost tempted to suspect that the distinction was due to it. That was — simplicity — the total lack of posing, of self-consciousness.

Lincoln, Frémont, Agassiz, and Emerson were direct in manner as children. So are Grover Cleveland and Booker Washington to-day. Having a message to give in life, these men thrust it at the world straight, and let their own selves and training shrivel back out of sight.

This trait shows itself in such men by their utter absorption in the present moment. Some one said the other day of Mr. Cleveland: "Whether he snubs the British lion or catches a squeteague, he does nothing else. He is all there."

General Frémont had this trait to an ex-

Bits of Gossip

cess. He literally abandoned himself to the moment.

When he was the popular idol of the North and had struggled ineffectually for months to keep his place as leader in the army, he was at last driven by injustice, as he believed, to give up the struggle. He resigned his command in Virginia and came home direct to New York, arriving at midnight, to the horror and despair of his friends and party. Right or wrong, it was the crisis of his life, and he had lost.

I happened to be at his house that night, a young girl from the country, a most insignificant visitor. But I was a stranger. I never had seen New York, and I was his guest.

He gave the next day to making a careful map of the city and of the jaunts to country and seaside, that I might "understand it all." It was not a perfunctory duty. His mind was wholly in it for the moment.

It may be egotistic in me to recall this little incident. But he was the great man of my youth, and he is dead.

A Peculiar People

I may at least say, like poor Jo, at the grave: "He was very good to me."

If the great pathfinder was the incarnation of the chivalric spirit of his cause, Horace Greeley embodied as fully its exaggerated phases.

I saw him first when I was a schoolgirl in a little town in Pennsylvania. The lecturer was then in the height of his career; he was the new-found educator of the whole country; every village waited breathless for him to come and waken its sleeping intellect. He came, incessantly. One week Holmes read poems to us; the next Saxe gave us puns; again we plunged into the mysteries of buried Nineveh. On this night the little church was crowded to the doors, and all of the kerosene lamps blazed and smoked joyfully. Every man in the town took the New York "Tribune" and accepted it as gospel, and Horace Greeley was believed to write the whole of it, down to the death notices.

And now, there he was himself, the great northern prophet and leader! He stood

Bits of Gossip

down in front of the pulpit, near to us. His head was a round, shining ball, the few hairs straggled wildly over it, his blue, round eyes were those of a baby, his voice was a shrill squeak. He was vehement from the first sentence. He meant to help these young people, and this was his one chance in life to do it. His legs and arms wobbled continuously, as though every joint were unhinged. At last, in the height and paroxysm of his argument, when he had clenched you, wrestling with your reason as for life, he suddenly stopped, and taking out a huge yellow bandana handkerchief held it at length by the two corners, and stooping down sawed it energetically across his legs.

That was the end. And yet, so passionate was his appeal, so fine and high the truth which he had forced on us, that nobody laughed. The audience dispersed in an awed silence. As you went out of the hall something choked your throat, and the hot tears stood in your eyes.

Anecdotes of Horace Greeley's absurd and childish doings circulated widely during his

A Peculiar People

life. Any vulgar scribbler or cartoonist could point them out with giggles and hisses. Only those who worked under him or knew him well understood how great and sincere was the soul beneath them. It belonged to his temperament to be sensitive and easily hurt as a child. There is no doubt that the malignant ridicule heaped upon him during the campaign in which he was a candidate for the presidency, shortened his life.

After all, as far as the Abolition party was concerned, the war was very like the tourney in "Ivanhoe." One famous leader after another came to the front, — Frémont, Beecher, Greeley, — to be unhorsed by their own party and carried from the field.

The struggle for command in the dominant party during the Civil War was as hot and relentless as it is to-day. During the years immediately before the struggle began, the Abolitionists naturally were abhorrent to all the other parties.

There was one family, new-comers in our little town, who were accused of being emissaries of Garrison, I do not know how truth-

Bits of Gossip

fully, and in consequence were socially tabooed. They were illiterate, noisy radicals, believers in spiritualism, in divorce, and in woman's rights. They lived in a little farmhouse on the edge of the borough. In the spring of 1859 a tall, gaunt old man visited them, who came into the town sometimes, stalking up and down the streets with his eyes fixed and lips moving like a man under the influence of morphia. After he had disappeared, it was told that he was a poor farmer from the West who was insane on the question of slavery, and that he had brought a quantity of huge pikes and axes to the house of our new neighbors, with which the slaves in town were to kill their masters whenever there should be an uprising.

I remember how we all laughed at the story. The children used to tease the old black aunties and uncles to show them how they meant to stab them with pikes or behead them with axes when the day came. We thought it a very good joke.

But five months later, when the old farmer died at Harpers Ferry, on that bright Octo-

A Peculiar People

ber day, the whole world looking on with bated breath, the pikes were brought out of hiding by his friends, who declared that they never had meant to give them to the negroes to use, and had thought the old man mad.

The race for whom he had made the pikes certainly never would have used them. They are not a cruel nor malignant people. During the Civil War the women and children of the South were wholly under the protection of their slaves, and I never have heard of a single instance in which they abused the trust.

I married before the war was over, and came to live in the North, where I met many of the men and women who had kindled the fire under the caldron.

In the flush of victory their motives and their oddities came out more plainly. Wendell Phillips had precisely that indefinable personal dignity and charm which Horace Greeley lacked; perhaps he had a little too much of it as an orator. You were so interested in the man that you forgot the cause that he urged.

Bits of Gossip

I saw him first when he came to Philadelphia during the war, to fan the zeal of the Quaker wing of his party to fiercer heats. The audience was small, mostly made up of gentle, attentive women Friends, who in their white caps and dove-colored garments seemed to make a band around him of moderation and calm — virtuous but stifling. His brief, fiery sentences fell into it and went out as barbed arrows shot into a down cushion. When he ended with a passionate appeal they looked mildly at one another, nodded and smiled, and a low “Um — um-m” of approval breathed through the hall.

When the next speaker rose Mr. Phillips found his way to the corner where we sat, with the “world’s people.”

“Did you ever hear,” he said abruptly, “of Sarah Siddons’ first appearance in Edinburgh? She had heard that the Scotch were a lethargic folk, and put forth all her powers to move them. Lady Macbeth was so terrible that night that she shivered with horror at herself; but her audience sat calm and dumb. In the sleep-walking scene she was

A Peculiar People

used, in London, to see the whole house rise in terror; men would shriek and women be carried out fainting. But now there was unbroken silence, until an old man in the pit chuckled and said aloud to his neighbor: 'Aweel, Sandy, that 's nae so bad!'

"But the Philadelphians," he added, with a forced laugh, "do not commit themselves as far as that!"

Yet these identical dove-colored women had lighted the torch which set the country on fire. The headquarters of the Abolition party was among the Philadelphia Quakers. Here for years was the northern station of the famous secret Underground Railroad, by which thousands of flying slaves escaped. The agent here was William Still, a grave, shrewd negro, who died only two years ago, leaving a large fortune which he had amassed in trade.

The fugitive slaves came to him in every kind of disguise and were hid until they could be sent on to Canada. He published an account of it all after the war was over. No tragedy ever was more dramatic than these

Bits of Gossip

records set down from day to day. The slaves always gave him an account of themselves, their masters and their families. One evening came a couple of gray-haired old men, brothers, who had escaped from Alabama. They told him they had been sold when boys by their master in Maryland. Their mother and her baby were not sold. They never had seen or heard of either of them again.

“What was your Maryland master’s name?” asked Still. They told him. He waited until the room was clear.

“I am your brother,” he said. “*I* was the baby. But our mother is dead.”

Another negro prominent in those days among the Abolitionists was a Mrs. Frances Harper, an able, ambitious woman, who lectured with a strange, bitter eloquence.

Charles Sumner was often in consultation with these Philadelphia leaders, but I never happened to see him. Whittier also came, and James Russell Lowell. But Lowell’s politics and poetry were, as a rule, kept inside of his books. He himself in every-day life was so simple, so sincere, so human, that

A Peculiar People

you forgot that he had any higher calling than that of being the most charming of companions.

Mr. Whittier, on the contrary, was always the poet and the Abolitionist. He did not consciously pose, but he never for a moment forgot his mission. He was thin, mild, and ascetic, looking like a Presbyterian country minister. He gave his views of slavery and the South with a gentle, unwearied obstinacy, exasperating to any one who knew that there was another side to the question.

I never saw a human being with a personality more aggressive than that of Henry Ward Beecher. No matter how crowded the room might be, you were conscious only of this huge, lumbering man in it, who was so oddly unconscious of himself. He had too big a nature for vanity. His brain was eager and grasping. Whether the talk turned on a religion or a bonnet, he caught the subject with impatient force and tore the whole meaning out of it. He was, too, more than other people — human. He was indifferent to nothing. Every drop of his thick blood

Bits of Gossip

was hot with love or hate. He was an Abolitionist, not so much from love of Freedom as love of the poor black man himself. His humor was that of Dooley, not Lamb. He had the voice of a great orator; if you did not know the language he spoke, the magnetism in it would make you laugh or cry.

He had an enormous following of men and a few women. But, back of the heavy jaws and thick lips and searching eyes swathed in drooping lids, back of the powerful intellect and tender sympathy, there was a nameless something in Mr. Beecher which repelled most women. You resolved obstinately not to agree with his argument, not to laugh or cry with him, not to see him again.

Perhaps it is ungracious in me to tell this. But I cannot give the impression he made without it. He was always Doctor Fell to me, in spite of his strength and the wonderful charm of his sympathy with every living creature.

I met him first at a large dinner-party in New York. He knew me only as a young

A Peculiar People

girl from the hills in Virginia, a friend of his friends. But he heard me speak of certain forgotten old hymns of which I was fond.

“Bring her to Plymouth Church next Sunday,” he whispered to my hostess.

There was an immense audience in the great church that Sunday. The seats rose as in a circus up from the pulpit; they were all full and the aisles were packed with men standing; at the back were the organ and choir. During the service that great congregation sang, one after another, every one of the old hymns that I loved. The vast volume of sound rose to Heaven as one soft, pleading voice. I never shall forget that morning. The incident shows the tact, the eagerness of the man to be kind to everybody.

Then there were many Quaker women, honest of heart, sweet of face, soft of speech, and narrow in their beliefs, as only your gentle, soft woman can be. Chief among them was Eliza Randolph Turner, who first invented the “Children’s Week” charity, and, later, founded and governed an immense guild of working women in Philadelphia. She died

Bits of Gossip

a year or two ago, and she cannot be now in any other of God's worlds a more efficient angel than she was here to poor shop women and sick babies.

Her allies were Mary Grew and Margaret Burleigh. The three dove-colored women lived in a huge quiet house, surrounded by trees, in Philadelphia. They preached and worked together, close as Siamese twins. It never occurred to any of them that they had come into the world for any other purpose than to reform it.

I remember that I was with Mary Grew and her friend, Mrs. Burleigh, when the news came of the final passage of the Fifteenth Amendment. The hope of their lives was accomplished. But they were silent for a long time.

“What will thee and I do now?” one said to the other drearily. “There is prison reform? Or we might stir up women to vote?”

They could hardly wait until the next day to begin.

The queen bee of this buzzing swarm was Lucretia Mott, one of the most remarkable

A Peculiar People

women that this country has ever produced. Fugitive slaves, lecturers, reformers, everybody who wanted help, and everybody who wanted to give help, found their way to her quiet little farmhouse on the Old York Road; some were checked and some urged onward, but all were cared for and helped. No man in the Abolition party had a more vigorous brain or ready eloquence than this famous Quaker preacher, but much of her power came from the fact that she was one of the most womanly of women. She had pity and tenderness enough in her heart for the mother of mankind, and that keen sense of humor without which the tenderest of women is but a dull clod.

Even in extreme old age she was one of the most beautiful women I ever have seen. She was a little, vivid, delicate creature, alive with magnetic power. It is many years since that charming face with its wonderful luminous eyes was given back to the earth, but it is as real to me at this moment as ever.

I remember that once a southern woman met Mrs. Mott at our house. With all slave-

Bits of Gossip

holders she had been taught to abhor her as the modern Borgia — the planner of war and murders. When she caught sight of her as she came into the room she gasped out, "Why! she looks like a saint!"

She talked much to her during the evening, and after she had gone said earnestly: "I believe that that woman *is* one of the saints of God!"

When you were with Mrs. Mott you were apt to think of her as the mother and house-keeper rather than as the leader of a party. She came from Nantucket, and until the day of her death kept up the homely, domestic habits of her youth. She might face a mob at night that threatened her life, or lecture to thousands of applauding disciples, but she never forgot in the morning to pick and shell the peas for dinner. Her fingers never were quiet. She knitted wonderful bedspreads and made gay rag-carpets as wedding gifts for all of her granddaughters.

She had, oddly enough, the personal charm, the temperament, the hospitable soul of a southern woman. I used wickedly

A Peculiar People

to wish that she had been born on the other side.

How she would have glorified her duty as a slaveholder and magnified her office! And how they would have appreciated her beauty and charm down there!

We native Americans are of many opinions — according to the place where we happen to be born — but of one kin. Scratch the skin of a slaveholder or an Abolitionist and you find the same blood — and good honest blood it is!

VIII

ABOVE THEIR FELLOWS

I SHOULD like to tell you something of a few men whom I have happened to meet, — some of the Hamans and Mordecais whom Americans in the last century delighted to honor. But remember, I am no politician, and no seer into souls. I can give you no new insight into their characters, nor any hints which will make their work in the world clearer to you.

The only hero known to my childhood was Henry Clay. It would be impossible to make this generation understand what the great Kentuckian was to the country then. Americans, now, are concerned about ideas or things — Imperialism, Labor, the Trusts, or the like. Then they cared for the individual man. Clay, Webster, or Jackson, in their day, was personally loved or hated with a kind of ferocity.

Above Their Fellows

None of our public leaders now wins that worshiping, close allegiance from his followers. There are several reasons for the blind devotion of the American people, then, to their leaders, and the lack of it to-day. The nation was smaller then than now. It was still made up of the three original families, — the English Churchmen, the Scotch-Irish, and the Puritans. The great flood-tide from every nation under heaven had not yet set in upon our shores. People knew each other; they were neighborly, in the village sense of the word. There were few newspapers and no reporters. Public men could not speak daily to the nation by telegraph, nor make themselves known to it by their portraits in every evening's edition.

They met their constituents face to face. Even travel promoted this personal intimacy. They did not go to bed in Philadelphia to waken in Chicago. They jogged to and fro in private conveyances or by stage-coach, and so came to know every man and woman on the road, and made themselves loved or hated, as they cannot now do by print or telegraph.

Bits of Gossip

What opportunities there were for quarrels or confidences in the leisurely journeys on the National Road — the one great highway of the country! Men found each other out in the long days of jolting side by side, or during the nights in the inns which were set along the road from Maryland to Indiana. There the guests ate heavy suppers of venison and bear steak and corn dodgers, and gathered around huge fireplaces where a ton of coal or whole logs of wood roared and burned.

There was no more hearty companion for these journeys than "Henry;" no one who had a larger stock of stories, or who took or gave a joke with finer humor.

In the village in which we lived Clay was a demigod. To the women and children he was not exactly human. I remember when I was about five years old that I once heard two planters from Kentucky discussing him with my father.

"Harry," they said, "has wasted his chances. If he had looked after his stock and let politics alone, he would have been well-to-do to-day!"

Above Their Fellows

I was cold with horror as I listened. If they had attacked the Bible itself they would not have seemed to me more blasphemous. Henry Clay and cattle!

I had heard that this, the One Man, was a personal friend of my father, and I felt that all of the family, for that reason, took place in the ruling class of the world. Long afterwards I knew that every man in the village was his intimate friend, and every other man to whom he could talk for half an hour.

A lithograph of the one great man then hung in every house in the South. I used to hold my breath with awe when I chanced to look at that ugly, powerful face. The black hair swept back from the towering forehead, precisely, I thought, as in the pictures of Olympian Jove! The eyes concealed power greater than that of a mere man — the sensitive chin, the huge mouth, the cloak thrown back with imperial grace — surely this was a being much more than human!

Many rational men and women shared then in my childish worship. No man probably ever won such affection from the people

Bits of Gossip

of this country as "Henry," as they loved to call him. Sometimes it was "Harry," or "The Mill Boy of the Slashes."

His journeys from his plantation in Kentucky to Washington and back by slow plodding stage-coach and boat were long panoramas of cheering crowds.

The poorest river hand or red-faced farmer who had ridden twenty miles "to see Clay go by" felt a proud, personal ownership of him, pored every week over his speeches in the "United States Gazette" with hot, beating pulses, or chuckled secretly as he whispered to his neighbor stories of Clay's duels or other doubtful doings.

"Henry will be Henry to the last!" he would say fondly, as one speaks of the brilliant, dear vagabond of the family.

An old friend, Mr. R——, once told me of an incident very characteristic of Clay. When he, R——, was a boy of ten, he was at work alone late one evening in his father's office.

It was in a village on the National Road through which the coaches ran from Washington to the wilderness of the West. A tall

Above Their Fellows

man wrapped in a cloak hastily entered, and asked for his father.

“He is not at home,” said the boy.

The stranger with a gesture of annoyance turned to go out. But the lad suddenly recognized him and dashed between him and the door.

“Oh, Mr. Clay! Can *I* do anything for you? Oh, if I could!”

Clay hesitated. “Why, my lad, I find myself short of money,” he said. “I came to borrow a hundred dollars from your father until I reach Washington. But” —

The boy knew his father to be one of Clay’s most loyal friends and followers.

“I can get it! He would be mortified if you left his office without it,” he cried, and his hands shaking with eagerness, he opened the desk and took out the money.

Clay thanked him and turned to the coach waiting outside.

In a few days the money was returned, and the incident, the boy supposed, was forgotten.

But two years later Mr. Clay came to this

Bits of Gossip

village during a presidential campaign in which he was the popular candidate. Bands played, the militia marched, oxen and sheep were roasted whole, the entire county assembled in a fever of excitement.

At last the great man appeared on a platform, and the principal men of the county were formally brought forward to be presented to him.

Suddenly he stepped quickly to the edge of the platform and beckoned to a small boy perched on a tree across the field.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," he said, "but there is a personal friend of mine whom I must take by the hand."

"I went up," said Mr. R——, "my feet like lead and my head on fire. He shook hands with me and kept me beside him, his hand on my shoulder, while the great men were introduced. He was their leader, but he was my friend. I am eighty years old," he added solemnly, "and that was the proudest, best minute of my life. From that day that man was more to me than any other man."

"Clay," an old kinsman of mine once told

Above Their Fellows

me," never forgot the face of friend or enemy. He would take up you and your talk just where you had left off with him years before."

The same man told me that Clay once visited a little town in Pennsylvania after an absence of ten years. He was on his way to take his seat in Congress. It was a dark winter's evening, but he was recognized as he left the stage-coach and hurried into the supper room of the inn. The news flew from house to house that Clay was in town, and every man in the village gathered in the hall of the inn to see him as he came out. The burgess, a consequential little fellow, who had once traveled as far as Washington City, called out: —

"Form two lines, gentlemen! On either side. I know him. I will present you to Mr. Clay."

But just as the lines were formed the door opened and a large man with heavy jaws and keen black eyes stood an instant on the threshold.

"Ah!" he cried, with beaming eyes, "here is Wood! And Barnes! All my old friends!

Bits of Gossip

Humphreys, too?" He passed down between the lines, shaking hands, asking questions and joking. There was not a man whom he had met ten years before that he did not hail by name.

At last he stopped. "Ah! Here's somebody I don't know. Wait! One minute!" holding the man by the hand and eyeing him keenly. "That is a Pugh nose, I'll wager my life! You are John Pugh's son! Ah?"

"That hit won the game," said the storyteller. "There was a shout of delight, and the crowd followed him to the coach cheering until it was out of sight. Every man there voted for him at the next election. Pugh stumped the county for him. We felt that it was a man with a brain like that who was needed at the helm of state."

Another of our leaders — James G. Blaine — possessed this abnormal memory for faces and names. It was as useful to him as a sixth sense. Behind it, too, in his case, there were the warm heart and ardent instincts which came to him from his Irish forefathers. He won as devoted an allegiance from the nation

Above Their Fellows

as did Clay. I don't believe, by the way, that any man, be he statesman or writer or soldier, ever has gained that passionate loyalty from the public who did not have red blood at heart and the boyish temperament.

When I was a schoolgirl in Washington, Pennsylvania, James Blaine was a big, ungainly law student in the same village. It consisted then of a cluster of quaint stone and brick houses built in colonial times, in the midst of the rich farms and low-rolling hills of western Pennsylvania. It is a prosperous city now, but in the leisurely, calm forties nobody thought of huge rivers of gas hidden beneath the old dwellings and their great gardens of Bourbon roses and Canterbury bells.

A college and a girls' school then kept the village alive and gave a scholastic flavor to its talk and habits of thought. Old school Calvinism was the dominant faith, and to the kindly, slow-going, conservative folk the unpardonable sin and hell were facts quite as real and present as were their own borough laws or little brick jail.

Bits of Gossip

At the foot of the steep, grassy street stood a gray, rambling house with wide porches in front, and at the back there was a meadow through which a sleepy brook crept. This was the Blaine homestead. The family was made up of two or three gentle, low-voiced women and a troop of noisy young men. They were popular with the villagers, and yet were looked upon doubtfully by some of them. Did not the women, thorough-bred as they were, carry rosaries? Was there not a Madonna on the walls?

But everybody liked one of the boys, — Jim, a big, awkward collegian, with a joke and a hearty word for even the gutter dogs. But nobody expected the lazy, good-natured fellow to make any mark in the world.

One of his old neighbors said to me lately: "Even as a boy Blaine had a curious magnetism and charm. I remember that one day when I was a child I was bidden to draw some fresh water. I was in a rage at leaving my book, and finding the pail nearly full, threw the water out of the door just as Jim was passing, in his Sunday suit, on his way

Above Their Fellows

to a party. He was drenched from head to foot. I stood aghast and dumb; he turned and hurried home. Presently he came back, dry, but in his old clothes. He stopped and nodded gayly.

“‘Don’t worry, Will! I did n’t care to go to the old party, anyhow!’ stopping my stammering apologies by sitting down to joke and laugh with me.”

The trifling act shows the same kind heart and unerring tact which enabled James G. Blaine during so many years to control warring elements in Congress as no other man ever has done.

His good humor was imperturbable. A rancorous western politician met him one day on the steps of the Capitol with: “Mr. Blaine, I am a stranger to you. But I take the liberty of telling you that you are a fool and a scoundrel!”

“Really?” said Blaine, lifting his hat. “Now I wonder what you would have said if you had been my intimate friend?”

Like Clay, Mr. Blaine had an enormous following of friends. Both men had the royal

Bits of Gossip

power of personal magnetism. Blaine's interest in people was genuine and unaffected. If he gave his hand to you he made you feel sure that some of his heart went with it.

Some time, long ago, there had been an intermarriage in our families, so that we always—in the southern phrase—“called cousins,” and having this background of old times and childish friends we kept up the fiction of relationship through life, until we, too, were old and gray.

During his busy years of public life when on his way from Washington to New York he would dodge committees and crowds at the Philadelphia station and come to us for a quiet hour or two of—“Do you remember?” or “What has become of” this or that old comrade?

He kept sight of all the poor, obscure friends of his boyhood, and as I learned elsewhere, he never, with all his burden of work and worry, failed to help them or their children when they needed help.

No doubt, in public life, Mr. Blaine may have gilded the gold of his friendly impulses

Above Their Fellows

by a little finesse. On one occasion when he was to be the guest of honor at a large banquet in Philadelphia, he asked my husband as we sat at dinner, "What are the names of the principal men that I shall meet to-night?"

They were told to him.

An hour later, when they were presented to him, Blaine detained each with a look of sudden keen interest.

"B——? did you say? There was a great jurist B—— in Philadelphia when I was a boy — He stood in the highest court of the temple while I was peeping through the fence" —

"My father, sir." And B—— passed on, flushed and smiling.

"W——? Of English descent? I see it in your features — the name, too. It goes back to Elizabeth's time. Not from Leamington? Why, you must be a descendant of the Bishop, — the immortal W——?"

How did he know that the one weakness of this W—— was to be thought a descendant of the famous Bishop? How, in that brief hour after dinner, had he summoned

Bits of Gossip

into his brain all the pleasant facts or fancies that clung to the names of these strangers, so that by a word he made them his allies for life?

He altered very little during his life. When he was the brilliant, popular college boy of the village, he did not care a groat for the honors which he won. When he was a candidate for the presidency, beneath the able politician was a melancholy idler, who at heart did not care whether he ever entered the White House or not.

I heard him say the week before the convention met which meant to nominate him:—

“I am sick to the soul of the public and of public life. I want a quiet home, my children, and peace for my old age.”

He meant it—on that day. The next he was hard at work plotting for the nomination.

He came of an able, scholarly, sluggish stock. He had the strong brain, the keen perception, the unerring tact needed to control masses of men—when he cared to control them. The powerful engine was there, but not always the fire to move it. He was pushed

Above Their Fellows

forward and held back throughout his life by the ambition or faults of his weak retainers.

I never happened to meet Edgar Allan Poe, but during my girlhood I knew intimately a family who had been among his nearest friends in Richmond. They always spoke of "Edgar" affectionately, as a loveable, nervous man, who, like too many men of that day, drank hard, and fell in and out of love easily. They testified that he was a tender son and faithful husband. "No woman," they said, "was ever the worse for Poe's love."

One of his most loyal friends was Susan Archer Talley, a young girl with whom he corresponded for years. I was told, then, that she preserved as her chief treasure a copy of his works which he had given to her. The margin of almost every page was covered with his penciled criticisms of his own work, usually sharp and bitter beyond measure. Mrs. Talley Weiss is still living. She probably knows what became of this book. It must have been lost, for no collector could own such a treasure now without boasting of it to the public.

Bits of Gossip

Poe's detractors, who never saw him, asserted that even as a boy he was "a moral monster," and was driven from the house of his adopted father, Mr. Allen, on account of some crime, "too horrible to record upon any other register than that of Hell." My friends, who had known him since his childhood, stated that his worst fault was that he occasionally came home drunk. Mr. Allen's new wife naturally objected to this conduct. A quarrel ensued, and the boy went out to earn his own living.

After I came to live in Philadelphia, I heard much of Poe from Charles J. Peterson, who, as the editor of "Graham's Magazine," had known the poor Virginian intimately for six years.

Mr. Peterson was not only a scholar, but a man of the highest honor and sincerity. He described Poe as "a most gentle gentleman, always courteous, kindly, and honorable. He had one very common failing and was ashamed of it. His character was in no single feature unnatural or abnormal." He said that R. W. Griswold had for years a most intense

Above Their Fellows

jealousy and dislike of Poe, and frequently boasted to Mr. Peterson that he "had a rod in pickle for that fellow." He never, however, made any attack on Poe while he was living, but as soon as he was dead, an article charging him with being a soulless monster, addicted to abnormal crimes, was written by Griswold and published in the New York "Tribune," actually before the poet was laid in his grave. It is strange that the public should have attached any importance to a slander which was never spoken of the man while living, but was poured out with inhuman virulence upon his coffin the moment that the lips were dumb that could have answered it.

Poor Poe, thinking that Griswold was his friend, left a request that he should act as his literary executor, thus giving him the power to authoritatively belittle him as a poet, and vilify him as a man.

We all know how brutally this power was abused. For a generation the country was made to shudder at this "large-brained soulless creature, a unique bundle of inhuman vices."

Bits of Gossip

All this is over now, and Poe is fairly judged. The world recognizes the fact that he had the ordinary faults of his class and time, and that nothing worse could be said of him. In other countries he takes rank as our greatest poet. Mr. Griswold is remembered anywhere only as the man who belied him.

Another poet whom popular prejudice clothed with abnormal qualities was Walt Whitman. His disciples regarded him as the one bard of the century — the only one that America has ever produced. His voice, they declared, would be heard by all the listening nations of the earth as he proclaimed universal democracy, as one that chants at dawn in the forests the coming of a new day. They claimed, too, that he was not only the one poet, but the chief Patriot of his age, the universal brother of us all, with a heart big enough to take whole races home to it, and to still their hunger and pains in its love.

Chief of these excited followers was William O'Connor, a kindly, sincere man, who left his

Above Their Fellows

cradle with his imagination at white heat and never suffered it to cool afterwards.

He was a little man, who always wore a high hat, and walked on tiptoe, and talked in superlatives, and hurled defiance at the slave power with every breath. He wrote a novel called "Harrington," which he hoped would rout and vanquish the South utterly. After the war was over, he took a brief for Bacon vs. Shakespeare, and became one of the Pfaff crowd of Bohemians, a hater of orthodoxy, a dabbler in all kinds of heresies. He made Walt Whitman an idol, and sang pæans to the Good Gray Poet with his whole being.

William O'Connor, however, calmed down in his later years, and under the guardianship of Sumner Kimball found a place in the Life-Saving Service. Nobody could be long factitious in the atmosphere of that most sane, noble department of the government. O'Connor did much quiet good work in it before he left the world.

So profound was the faith of his devotees in Whitman that they made incessant pilgrimages to his house in Camden as to a shrine,

Bits of Gossip

never coming away without laying gifts upon the altar. When he died they paid homage to the memory not only of the poet but the man, saluting him as the "most eminent citizen of the Republic." The shades of Confucius, Buddha, and the Saviour were summoned at his grave, to welcome their peer into the heavens.

On the other side was a large, equally unreasonable public, who believed Whitman to have been a sort of devil. They denied him any spark of divine fire; the poems which his disciples regarded as immortal treasures of inspiration they described as "dunghill heaps of filth and corruption." They held the man himself to have been a monster of vice. He was discharged from the service of the government, when a member of the Cabinet read his poems, as promptly as a beast of prey would be driven out of a village sewing circle, and by special edict the poems were forbidden circulation in the mails.

Surely a cool posterity will acknowledge that this huge, uncouth fellow had the eye and tongue of the seer. To him, as to Dante

Above Their Fellows

and the oracle, it was given sometimes to be spokesman for the gods, to talk of death and life, in words not unworthy of their themes.

[But while the light burning within may have been divine, the outer case of the lamp was assuredly cheap enough. ^[evaluated] Whitman was, from first to last, a boorish, awkward *poseur*.]
He sang of the workingman as of a god, but he never did an hour's work himself if he could live by alms; he sounded the note of battle for the slave, but he never shouldered a gun in the fight; he cursed shams, while he played the part of "bard," as he conceived it, in flowing hair and beard, gray clothes, broad rolling collar and huge pearl buttons, changing even his name to suit the rôle; he saluted Christ as "my comrade," declaring that "we walk together the earth over, making our ineffaceable mark upon time and the eras," while he, Whitman, was loafing in a comfortable house in Camden, provided for him by charity, accepting weekly the hard-earned money of poor young men, while he had thousands hoarded which he spent in building a tawdry monument to himself. As to the im-

Bits of Gossip

morality in his poems, it is not worth while to talk of demoniac possession, as do his enemies. Whitman simply was indecent as thousands of other men are indecent, who are coarse by nature and vulgar by breeding. Hawthorne, when he saw the Venus of the Uffizi Palace, acknowledged its greatness, but added, "To my mind Titian was a very nasty old man" — a criticism which goes to the root of the matter in Whitman as in Titian, and leaves no more to be said.

These were men of genius. But there have been others in my time who had no genius, but who succeeded in acquiring great influence over their generation by the exactness with which they knew and used their talent. Self-recognition, perhaps, would be the best name for the quality.

Of course we all, at once, think of Macaulay as foremost among these skillful and prudent craftsmen in the clan that deals with ideas and words.

In this country Dr. J. G. Holland, probably, had more of this peculiar clarity of self-insight than any of our other writers. Greater men

Above Their Fellows

than he sometimes tripped because they ventured outside of their limits. Poe often essayed to be scientific, Longfellow dramatic, and Hawthorne logical.

But the Doctor, or Timothy Titcomb, as he was called by the worshiping boys and girls of the sixties, knew his Muse and never mistook her meaning for a moment. She was no scatter-brained, raving Delphian priestess, but a healthy, friendly, clear-minded counselor, who gave out her oracles daily to the young folks— oracles alive with kindness and common sense.

The Doctor's work in the world was like the water of a mountain spring, — it brought out a good, useful growth wherever it went. We sing the praises of the red wine which mounts to the head in a fine frenzy now and then. But we are apt to undervalue the plain water which keeps things clean and wholesome for us.

The Doctor himself was as kindly and wholesome as his poetry. I hope you do not know already one story of him, which I must tell you, as it shows how much can be done

Bits of Gossip

by a man who accurately knows himself and his limits.

Two Americans chanced to meet in Switzerland one day, and speedily felt a strong mutual approbation and liking for each other. One was the then popular poet, Timothy Titcomb, and the other was Roswell Smith, a man who had shrewd business ability, a passionate love of letters, and capital. Together, standing on the bridge at Bâle, they conceived the idea of a magazine which should be to American literature as the lighting of a great lamp. They came home and issued it. Dr. Holland was the editor and his friend the publisher, and as long as they lived the friendship and the work planned that morning on the bridge grew and prospered. Neither man interfered with the other. Each knew his bounds and kept inside of them.

Outside of business both were friendly, hopeful men, eager to help their fellow travelers on their journey. Many a successful author and artist now living owes his first chance to the publisher and editor of the old "Scribner's."

Above Their Fellows

One of the most remarkable men I ever knew was Daniel S. Ford, the editor of the "Youth's Companion." He was set apart from all other men by his total lack of self-appreciation. He sincerely believed that that paper was a lever which would uplift the minds and souls of American children. He gave his life to this work, but he kept himself wholly out of sight. The paper was conducted under a fictitious name. His own never appeared in it until after his death. He blotted himself out of view, even out of his own view. It was a noble trait and almost unique among Americans.

As for the women who have won fame in my day, the first fact which strikes me on turning to them is how entirely the popular woman of this country differs from that of older peoples.

We all know the *grande dame* of France and England, though we never may have seen her. She is as distinct a personality as the Sphinx or the Pope.

She may be beautiful or ugly, a saint or a Messalina, but she must be the outgrowth

Bits of Gossip

of a class set apart for generations as noble — finer than God's other creatures, and she must have, in consequence of this setting apart, that aloofness, that certain flavor of rank in manner and in look, to which most men do bow down even against their will. Beauty, wit, wealth, and virtue are aids to her making up, but not necessities. She has done without each and all of them, and still held her dominant place in life and in history.

Read the story of Lady Sarah Lennox as written the other day by her descendants. She had a current of blood in her veins coming down through princes from the very beginnings of England; her kinsfolk were dukes and earls; French *baronnes* and Russian princesses were her familiar gossips. George III loved her, and she believed was wretched all of his life because he was not allowed to place her beside him on the throne. She was — and never forgot that she was — of the ruling race in England. But her mind was of low rank; she talked and wrote and thought in atrocious English; she was blind to all of the great issues that move the

Above Their Fellows

world. She made of politics and literature cheap gossip. Her coquetry, and the crime to which it brought her, was that of a barmaid.

Not this the kind of woman surely whom Americans elect their Great Lady. My countrymen do not even cede this title to the American girls whose wealth or beauty has found places recently for them among the English nobility. They are good-naturedly glad to hear that Miss Pratt and Miss Smith are holding their own as Duchess and Princess over there. But they pay no more homage to them now than they did when they were schoolgirls and wore straw hats instead of coronets.

There have been, however, a few women who have been greatly venerated and loved in this country. There could be no better index to the kind of man that the American himself is, than are these women whom he has delighted to honor.

Oddly enough, the women who have won the hearts of our populace are not those whom their own sex has hailed as leaders. No wo-

Bits of Gossip

man author or clever reformer, no artist, no champion of her sex, has ever been made a popular idol by Americans.

The South always chose its reigning favorite, first for her power to charm, and next for her beauty. There always has been a reigning favorite down there. Each city and village in that quarter has to-day its noted belle, who is guarded and jealously served by the public with a pride and devotion incomprehensible to any man born north of the Ohio. But far above this countless galaxy have shone a few fixed stars, whose right to shine is as certain as that of the moon or planets.

Nelly Custis, Theodosia Burr, Dolly Madison, the Carroll sisters, Octavia Le Vert, Sallie Ward, Winnie Davis,—how shall I call the roll without fear of angry reminders of the countless illustrious “daughters of the Southland” whom I have missed? The essential point to us is, not who they were, but why were they crowned queens of love and beauty? What did southern men demand in the woman to whom they paid allegiance?

They all had the distinction of good birth

Above Their Fellows

and breeding; they sometimes had beauty, but always that personal attraction, that sweet, soft, elusive charm of the purely feminine woman. The old-time Southerners had very much the feeling toward their reigning belle that the Italian peasant once had for the Madonna. She expressed to him purity, motherhood, and religion, all in one.

I was once in a southern town when one of these famous beauties passed through on her way to the Virginia Springs. She remained all day with her escort in the little village inn, and all day a closely packed mass of men waited patiently outside to see her. Probably every man in the town was there. When the young girl was brought out at last to enter her coach, every head was uncovered. There was not a sound nor a whisper. With a deference that was almost reverent they gazed at her beauty and blushes, and stood bare-headed and still silent until she was out of sight.

Does this seem ridiculous to you? It was the natural homage of the man to youth and beauty and innocence, and I think it was a

Bits of Gossip

wholesome thing for both the man and the woman.

The women who have been personally popular and influential in the North have been of the same type, with the addition in most cases of some intellectual force.

At the outbreak of the Civil War the woman who probably was best known and most loved in this country was Jessie Benton Frémont. She was before the public by necessity. Benton's daughter naturally was known to everybody. She came, too, from the Virginia Preston family, and no woman of that blood ever could be ignored, go where she might. You might love her or hate her, but despise her you could not.

Mrs. Frémont, too, was the wife of the most picturesque of our political leaders. Everybody knew the story of how he had won her; how the young girl had seen, as nobody else had done, in the obscure, poor young soldier the coming hero, the man ready to give his life for a great idea; how they had run away together and married; how he had conquered a great territory for the country;

Above Their Fellows

how they had starved together in California and squandered a fortune together in Paris. The popular imagination was fired by the young girl, who in September was cooking flapjacks and bacon for her husband's dinner in a cañon, and in December sat in the box at the Opera opposite the Empress, intent on outshining Eugénie in beauty and in dress.

When the war began she threw herself with fervor into the northern cause, chiefly, I suspect, because it was her husband's cause. She went with him from camp to camp, to Missouri, to Virginia, to headquarters at Washington, firing, uplifting the purpose of every man who came near her. She had great beauty, an education more broad and thorough than that of most men, and a wit and magnetic charm probably never equaled by any American woman. Political leaders discussed their problems with her, and more than once her keen intuition showed them their way to success; regiments begged her blessing on their colors; enthusiastic young men formed themselves into bands of "Jessie's Scouts"

Bits of Gossip

or "Jessie's Lancers," and went out gayly to the field to kill or be killed.

But I do not believe that it was her wit or education or keen intellect which gave her this power over men. On the contrary, they were apt to be a little jealous of them. It was the eager, whole-hearted, beautiful woman, who ranked her husband as the first of men, who loved freedom and her country passionately because John C. Frémont loved them — that they followed and served.

There was doubtless something in her of the French *grande dame*. De Staël had not a more piercing wit, nor Récamier a finer quality of beauty, but below and apart from either was her personal magnetism. Whatever might be the room into which she came, whether in a palace or the shack of a ranch, she was the fire burning in it, the lamp that shone in it, the instrument of music that struck a note to which your secret self replied.

The most curious instance, however, of the power which lies in the purely feminine qualities in a woman is that of Frances Willard. In her case, oddly enough, it was her own

Above Their Fellows

sex that was influenced by them. Probably no woman who spoke English ever had as large a following of women as she. Shrewd matrons and eager young girls, who came once into contact with this gentle, soft-spoken lady, gave her ever after a passionate affection and adherence. She undertook an almost impossible work, to stamp out a universal evil. She had the courage of a great fighter, but her methods of warfare were always most simple and feminine. She told the world the story of her sister, an innocent young girl who had planned to do this work for humanity, and dying, had left it in her hands. She told the pathetic little story, and then appealed to women by their love for their homes and for God to help her to finish the work; she appealed to men by their love for their mothers, their wives, and their children, to suffer them to finish it. These surely were a woman's ways of working.

I never saw Frances Willard until a year before her death. Knowing how mighty was the world-old dragon which she had set out to slay, and how huge the army which she so

Bits of Gossip

skillfully commanded, I pictured her to myself as a modern Boadicea, large, strident in voice, and masterful in manner. I found a delicate, soft-eyed little woman, wonderfully tactful, ready to laugh at a joke, ready to fall into womanish little tempers when contradicted, but, still more than all, ready to pour out kindness and affection upon every wrongdoer. She would not drive him, but would lead him tenderly up to the straight gate and along the narrow path.

It was in England that I saw her. Englishmen, as we all know, have little sympathy with woman reformers of the belligerent class. It was amusing to see how quickly they were disarmed by Frances Willard's most feminine methods of attack.

I have known other women — whom I do not name because they are still living — who have exerted a wider and stronger influence in this country than any of these of whom I have spoken. In every instance there is nothing masculine in their character or habits of thought; they are womanly, even womanish in both.

Above Their Fellows

Is not that a significant fact?

It would seem that, even in this strenuous day, that woman does her work most effectively who uses only the woman's methods.

I think that I will end this long gossip here, not because I know no more great men, but because I have known so many that I cannot reckon them.

For it is an odd fact that when we look back as we grow old, the famous people do not rise above the nameless folk who filled for us the years that are gone. Not that the heroes are less heroic to us, but we see that the nameless folk only lacked the chance to do great deeds also.

"Robert Louis Stevenson?" we say, "Lee? Grant? De Wet? Would not Smith or Black, whom we used to know, have sounded as loud bugle-calls as theirs to the world if the bugle had ever been put to their lips?"

Smith and Black probably puzzled and bored us when we jogged along the path in their company, but now that we are old we see that they were made of heroic stuff.

Bits of Gossip

For it is a mistake to talk of the twilight of age, or the blurred sight of old people. The long day grows clearer at its close, and the petty fogs of prejudice which rose between us and our fellows in youth melt away as the sun goes down. At last we see God's creatures as they are.

So now, when I look back at the long road down which I have come, it seems to me to be filled with men and women who could have sounded the call which leads the world to great deeds. But the bugle never was put to their lips.

I see now, too, how unselfish and true were most of the folk who jostled me every day on my journey. I used to like or dislike them as Democrats or Republicans, whites, Indians or negroes, criminals or Christians.

Now, I only see men and women slaving for their children; husbands and wives sacrificing their lives to each other; loveable boys, girls with their queer new chivalric notions. I see the fun, the humor, the tragedy in it all; the desperate struggle of each one, day by day, to be clean and decent and true.

Above Their Fellows

The world is crowded with brave and friendly souls, though they may be slow in recognizing one another.

And of all the good things for which now, in the evening, I have to thank the Father of us all, the best is, that I have known so many of them, and for so long have kept them company.

The Riverside Press

*Electrotyped and printed by H. O. Houghton & Co.
Cambridge, Mass., U. S. A.*

64298-C
CR

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

Los Angeles

This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

REC'D LD-URC

Q1 OCT 07 1991

SEP 23 1991

REC'D LD-URC

Q1 OCT 1 1991

JUL 8 2 1998

Q1 APR 07 1997

APR 1 1999

Q1 APR 10 2001

MAY 01 2002

APR 21

University of California, Los Angeles



L 005 489 779 8



